ANATOLE FRANCE HIMSELF

BY

HIS SECRETARY

JEAN JACQUES BROUSSON

Otie Stibolt-Hass

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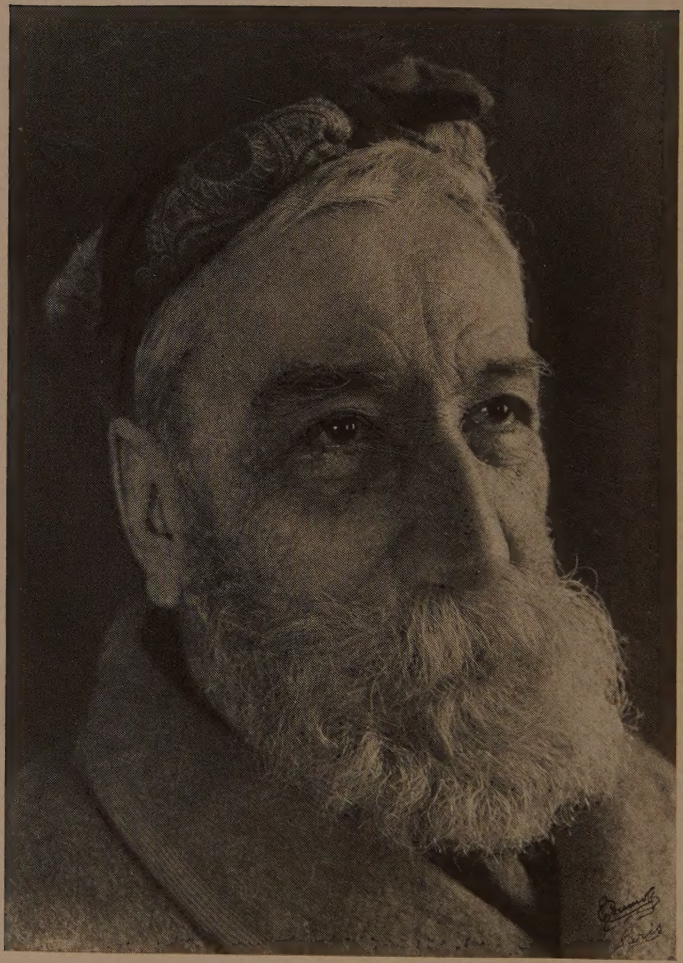
THIRD IMPRESSION



ANATOLE FRANCE HIMSELF

A Boswellian Record

BY
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JEAN JACQUES BROUSSON

TRANSLATED BY
JOHN POLLOCK

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TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

SOME English admirers of Anatole France will be surprised by passages in this fascinating book. In France its publication, and immense success, has had a beneficial effect on " M. Bergeret's " reputation. There was a tendency in his later years to consider Anatole France as an eminent but tiresome old man induced by undesirable connexions to devote his powers to regrettable objects. The anecdotes and table-talk so ingeniously strung together by M. Brousson, who was his secretary and intimate companion for eight years, have shown that down to a recent period there was yet life in the old dog, and life moreover of a peculiarly individual and racy character. A sad dog, he may have been in Puritan eyes, but there is no denying his vigour. The aim of M. Brousson's brilliant portraiture is to show Anatole France on his intimate side and without the trappings that almost all men put on for the public. As we see him in it, he is, perhaps not lovable, but he is certainly irresistible. There is an impishness in him that fascinates while it repels. M. Bergeret looked on life with eyes of Olympian irony, and it would be strange if his intimate talk on all matters under the sun had not been ironic. No lover of the *Contes de Jacques*

Tournebroche, Histoire Comique, or of the lamented Abbé Coignard, will regret to find their spirit so fully inspiring their creator's private conversation. A caustic and egotistical spirit it seems at the first blush. Mrs. Grundy will denounce it as a naughty spirit; but Anatole France was Mrs. Grundy's deadly foe and what she calls naughtiness he called life. And for those who look there is below more than the scintillating raillery of the surface. Love and beauty were to Anatole France the grains of gold dropped by the river of life. He could jest about them, with the wit and learning of which he was the inimitable master, but it is the serious appreciation, the passionate adoration rather, underlying the changes he rang on those two mighty strings, that makes him a source of inspiration and rebuts the charge of cynicism. If we must attach a moral to the figure that emerges triumphantly from the marvellous mosaic of M. Brousson's notebook it is, I think, this. To those who read aright, the great Pagan's fame will only be enhanced by the loving care that has set down all, and not feared to tell the truth.

J. P.

March, 1925

BY WAY OF PREFACE

DINNER at Lapérouse. Madame is there. The Master sulks. He shows his ill-humour by obstinate silence; also, by excessive courtesy. He passes the dishes with affected emphasis: "Take some more of this chicken, my friend. It is delicious. It is worthy of you. Would you have the great kindness to pass me the mustard?" This heavy gastronomic chat is accompanied by elaborate bows suggestive of a religious service. Storm looms over the little dining-room, ornamented with Fragonards of the Napoleon III period.

At dessert Madame makes a signal that the moment has come. The Master speaks with a rush, and in the staccato tone of an alarm clock going off.

"It appears, my young friend, that you keep a record of everything I say."

"Of everything you say; Master?"

"That you note down carefully in the evening what you have heard during the day."

Madame: "It is intolerable!"

I explain: "I share a banquet fit for kings: it is only charity to pick up the crumbs for the poor who are outside—for posterity."

A glimpse of blue is seen in the stormy sky.

"For posterity! For posterity! What is pos-

terity? It is you. It is I. It is Madame. We are all some one's posterity."

"I am doing for you, Master, what Florianet[1] did for Voltaire——"

"I am not Voltaire, but you are Florianet."

"I am not Florianet, and you are Voltaire. What the Abbé Ledieu did for Bossuet."

"You exceed the Abbé Ledieu in devotion, and I am not the Eagle of Meaux. What pleasure can you find in picking up the careless words that trickle down my old beard? A sadly perverted taste. After all, if you find it amusing——! And then, who can stop you? What I ask of you, my young friend, is not to publish any of this in my lifetime: you will not have long to wait. You would make me quarrel with too many people. When I am under the sod, make me say whatever you will. (Turning to Madame). Now, it would be indiscretion. Then, it will be erudition."

[1] J. P. C. de Florian, the writer of fables, was Voltaire's great nephew. His work, "Voltaire et le serf du Mt. Jura," was crowned by the Academy in 1782.—J. P.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A Young Man from the Country Comes to Paris	9
O Physics, Save Me from Metaphysics	14
Master	16
Aurora Musis Amica	17
The Fairy Bath	25
Think of Your Soul	26
The Skull-caps	28
The Mistress of the House	28
The Manuscript of Joan of Arc	31
Original Kisses	34
Tact and Taste	37
Stereoscopic Views	40
Cinna on the Phonograph	43
Attila Bleeds at the Nose	45
In Class	47
I Have Forgotten My Skull-cap	50
Two Conversations	52
The Fairy Umbrella	56
The Creed	58
Sunday Pleasures	59
At Flora's	61
An Interrogatory	61

PAGE

The Alibi 63
The Carmelite 63
Abstracted and Distracted 66
Disenchantment 70
Less Facts 71
The Ceremonies 73
White Sales 76
The Period 76
The Lover of Relics 77
First Love 81
Spelling Mistakes 85
Laborious Felicity 87
The Six Proofs 87
The Bastard Stop 89
The Scissors 89
Epithets All Contrary 92
Almond Icing 93
The Awakening of Vesuvius 94
Contrasts 95
Madam Rhetoric 95
Sublimity—Infirmity 96
At Huysmans' 97
Authenticity 101
The Satyr Tamed 102
Thalia and Clio 103
Academic Strategy 104

PAGE

The Veil of the Future 105
A Historic House 106
The Child Needs Waking Up 107
Fame and the Slippers 108
Rustic Pleasures 109
The Redemption of Books 110
The Nevers Dish 112
Chateaubriand's Stick 115
"The Banquet of Thais" 118
The Moment of Dusk 119
Friendship and Habit 121
The Honour of a Nobleman 122
The Byway 123
The Lordling of Champagne 124
Joan of Arc and Rabelais 129
The Two Bookcases 130
The Maid, a Kite 132
The Votive Offering 135
An Anecdote 136
De Maupassant's Trousers 137
Innocent Games 138
De Vigny's Ambition 139
Affectionate Calumnies 139
The Infirmity of Virtue 141
The Science of Love 142
Nothing in the Buttonhole 144

PAGE

A Positivist Demonstration 145
St. Francis' Roses 146
The Ram in the Convent 147
The Academy with the Cupola 149
The Profession of Dying 152
An Irresistible Argument 154
The Madman from Marseilles 155
A Holiday 156
The Leather Fan 161
Knees: Military and Modest 164
The Fair Garden of Sayings 166
The General Does His Exercises 167
A Composite Portrait 171
The Suffering Model 172
Multiplication 173
The Kiss to the Leper 174
The Cruellest of the Goddesses 177
Primus, Secundus, Tertia 178
Vain Charity 179
As Stupid as a Poet 179
Prize Lists and Armorial Families 180
The Triumph of the Obese 181
The Epileptic Pupil 186
The Pleasure of Suffering 187
Did René Save the Cathedrals? 188
Mélanie's Sauce 192

PAGE

The Weasel of the Refreshment Room 194
A Play for Réjane 195
In Praise of St. Louis 200
In Praise of Royalty 202
The King and the Shepherdesses 203
"Royal" 204
The Ladybird in the Engravings 206
Her Aunt's Pillow 208
Virgil, the Valet 209
The Ancestral Sign 210
The Ravages of Age 212
At the Cook-shop 213
Great and Perfect 216
I Have but One Soul 217
Respect St. Paul 218
Tyrannical Love 220
The King of Elixirs 222
Monsignor de Cabrières at M. Bergeret's 223
Distrust the Viscount 227
Prelate to Prelate Succeeds 230
You Will Be Immortal for Your Sins 233
The Grammarian and the Writer 233
The Fountain of Youth 236
Heredia's Ties 238
Credo Quia Absurdum 239
Napoleon the Sublime Buffoon 240

PAGE

An Historic Saying 242
Cæsar's Wife Cannot Be False 243
Hands Off 244
Natural History 245
He Was a Corporal 245
The Guiltiest 247
I Need No Glory 248
The Great Man Was Not a Man 249
Cæsar's Impotence 251
Jupiter Scapin 253
You Take Me Aback 255
He Has Given Me a Crooked Nose 256
Berlin, a Barracks 257
The Flag Game 262
The Sacrifice of the "Stew" 263
The Future City 264
I Am M. Ingres 265
Multiplication 265
Importunate and Inopportune 266
What Ought I to Have Done? 266
The Buddha 267
The Foot of England 270
Tradition and Soap 270
The Two Hands 271
A Record 275
Venus and the Black Virgin 276

PAGE

The New Physics and New Metaphysics 277
Metagrobolism 283
The Gold Bull's-Eye 284
Examinations 285
A Lesson in Mathematics 286
Fame 288
Hot Chestnuts 291
No, Not the Pantheon 292
Thorns to the Living, Roses to the Dead 296
Balzac 298
Chateaubriand's Inkstand 301
From the Bath to the Fire 305
The Unknown Masterpiece 308
Article de Paris 313
Take My Venus 316
Hugo and Béranger 321
Metamorphosis 324
A Dilemma 325
Duchesne, the Pirate 326
Judgment Revised 328
An Explanation 328
A Tour In Tours 328
Casuistry 332
The Blackest of the Children of Men 334
Oh, Gobineau! Oh, Stendhal! 336
The Blue Pots 336

PAGE

The Argentine Lady 339
Dynamite in Curl-papers 346
Live Happy in the World 347
The Historic Tablecloth 348
The Mechanism of Heaven and the Mechanism of Love 349
The Hideous Sense of Shame 349
Madame's Baba 350
Virtue and the Bolt 351
Bacchus and the Mobilization 351
The Silent Goddess 353

ANATOLE FRANCE HIMSELF

A YOUNG MAN FROM THE COUNTRY COMES TO PARIS

LIKE many another in these days, a young man came to Paris, freshly stamped with the hallmark of his provincial university. He brought with him a bundle of diplomas and manuscripts. While he waited for publishers and glory he lived in an attic in the Rue Serpente and picked up his livelihood by doing research in libraries for people who fancy themselves at archæology. One morning, a certain well-known Civil Servant, a Huguenot, who employed him for some work on the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, said to him without more ado: "Anatole France expects you to-morrow morning: it is Wednesday and his reception day. Give him this letter. He has need of somebody for his *Joan of Arc*."

Imagine the emotion of the young man from the country. He was from the Roman south of France and was fairly well up in the classics, but completely ignorant of contemporary literature. Yet he knew Anatole France because he was a classic, and the last of them.

Night brought him little sleep, but phantas-

magoric dreams of the reception in store. At dawn he slumbered, then awoke in terror: nine o'clock already! The reception is for eleven. But he has a vast distance to go. From the Rue Serpente to the Villa Said must be a good six kilometres. The young man from the country will do them on foot, first, out of economy, but also from shyness. He burns to see the famous author, and is afraid to get there. All the way, he lingers in cheap cafés, where drinks are served over counters that recall the communion table. He fills himself with coffee at a penny a cup. Many a thimbleful of cognac he takes to give himself courage. Why does no one invent a form of spirits against shyness?

Here at last is the Villa Said. The splendour of the district disconcerts him. He has lost his letter. No! It had only got tucked away. He waits on the doorstep. Perhaps the Master will come out. "What are you doing there, my young friend? Ah, it is you whom M—— has sent to me?" Nothing could be simpler. But he might stay on the doorstep till evening, for no one comes out. On the contrary, young men arrive. They ring the bell without the least emotion. They must be regular callers. How cheery they look! How well-dressed! How easy it seems to them! A quiet, plump manservant, with clear eyes and silky whiskers, opens the door. He seems a mixture of the pantry and the vestry—half duster, half cassock. He takes the callers' hats. He takes that

of the young man from the country. It seems Calvary to him, but up he must go, and he creeps in behind the throng. How disrespectful these young men are! Three or four bounds and they are up the staircase, carpeted almost with reliquaries, votive offerings, processional crosses. Now they have reached a kind of den transformed into a mediæval gallery. More reliquaries, more saints. The ceiling is picked out with lozenges of Spanish leather and oak woodwork. Everywhere you look are glass cases sparkling with curios. And books, books, books! There is a good roomful already. The Master is raised up at his desk. He wears a dressing-gown, felt slippers, and a silk skull-cap. In his hand are a drawing and a reading glass. He makes a little collective bow to the newcomers, who arrange themselves round the room. The young man from the country glides behind the library ladder where he can see and be unseen.

"You come at the right moment, gentlemen," Anatole France goes on. "You shall decide the question. We are in need of your judgment. Should a painter of religious subjects have faith? The other day I bought this lovely face from my friend Prouté: it is a Virgin by Boucher. This Virgin, it is clear, is not a model of virtue. Perhaps the artist painted it from his own wife and baby. Raphael, who worked for the popes, used to take boys as models for his Madonnas. I have

seen a sketch by him in which a young Italian, a handsome lad, dandles in his arms a bundle of rags. The divine Sanzio worked over the sketch. He draped the youth with the veil of modesty. He brought out the breast and under the pencil's caress the roll of stuff became the holy child, all dimples and laughter."

The young man from the country is dumbfounded at hearing the famous author discussing questions of art. The idea had never come to him, in his home, that one who wields the pen could busy himself with the brush. As the talk goes on, he greedily watches Anatole France. The Master is tall. He looks strong. The face is long as in certain portraits by Il Greco. He had thought he was less old. That was because he had seen him through the changeless crystal of his style. Besides he seems to have a certain vanity, not in making himself old, but in playing the part of a patriarch.

At the end of the reception, many of those present have favours to ask of him. When the young man from the country sees all the petitions presented, the notes handed up, the letters of introduction produced, he dares not bring out his own. He stays awkwardly behind his ladder. Now there remains, in this marvellously furnished den, but one suppliant, a little one-eyed man, bursting with Gascon vivacity. He corners the Master. He tells him a long, sad story. France feels in his pockets,

draws out a letter-case, and slips a hundred-franc note into the hand of the petitioner. He presses him close and long to his breast, then pushes him briskly to the staircase. When he hears the door below shut, he cries down over the bannisters:

"Josephine! Josephine! Never let that Cyclops come in here again! He has a genius for 'touching!'"

France goes into his bedroom. Tiptoe, the young man from the country makes off, his heart overflowing.

In the street he tears his useless letter of introduction to pieces. It gives him pleasure to see the fragments flutter off like butterflies. He has lacked courage. What! Twenty-one and free, and a coward! But the young man from the country had been immured in boarding-school and college, from the age of nine.

At his hotel, on his table of bare wood, a pneumatic,[1] and in the hand of the famous author:

"I waited for you all the morning. Why did you not come? Were you afraid of me? I shall be at home, to you only, to-morrow morning at the Villa Said.—ANATOLE FRANCE."

Vainly the maidservant tries to keep him out. The young man from the country brandishes his conquering pneumatic under her nose. The Mas-

[1] A letter sent by pneumatic post, the quickest system of correspondence in Paris. Before the war a pneumatic reached its destination in an hour; now in from two to three.—J. P.

ter receives him in the library. A short examination ensues.

"How much do you earn by working for M——?"

"Nothing."

"I will double your salary."

He explains what he will want me to do. For twenty years he has been working at a *Joan of Arc*. The Maid has suffered heavily from changes of house, and from divorces. He has mislaid references, and he wants the best and the most learned references to shut the mouths of those who maintain that he is only a novelist: "Numbers of folio volumes, you understand? That will look fine."

* * * * *

O PHYSICS, SAVE ME FROM METAPHYSICS

Suddenly he asks me: "Have you been freed?"

I stand perplexed: I do not know precisely what he means. Freed from what? From military service?

He makes himself clear.

"Have you been liberated from religious beliefs? Oh, the question is not in the least indiscreet. I say that to you, just as I would say: 'Have you a good digestion? Is your liver all right?' People are born churchy or unchurchy, just as they are born with a tendency to arterio-sclerosis, cancer, or consumption. Not all the preachings or all the proofs make any difference. Are there

more unbelievers to-day than in the fifteenth century, for instance? I do not think so. But then people feigned devotion from fear of the stake. He who is born an unbeliever, remains one all his life, and vice versa: he lacks the organ of superstition. In relation to heaven he is an eunuch. I had that infirmity or, if you like, advantage. That is why I inquire with such sympathetic interest about you. Anatomists will, I trust, one day discover the cause and seat of the religious spirit. I know nothing more terrible directed against its devotees than a saying of La Bruyère in his chapter—a feeble chapter too—in the *Esprits forts.*"

He chooses a La Bruyère from his library. He shows the edition with pride, it is that of——, the most notable of all. He finds the passage without difficulty, and reads: "'He who is in perfect health doubts the existence of God, but, when he gets a dropsy, leaves his mistress and sends for the priest.' He sends for a doctor at the same moment. Decay of the body induces decay of the mind. Faith and credulity are infirmities, and most often they are congenital. Sometimes a man lives with them without being too much harassed, just as one does with consumption, arterio-sclerosis, or cancer. But the downward turn comes and he gives himself to drugs and the Deity. A few extra grammes of sugar in his urine and the libertine goes to mass."

He turns again to his magnificent La Bruyère.

He reads: "It is a very serious thing to die." He shuts the book with disgust, and jeers: "What foolery! It is no harder than to be born. It is the end of the curve. Everyone is successful at that. It may be longer or shorter, more or less harmonious. We come from the womb to go and rot in the earth."

* * * * *

MASTER

On my calling him "Master," he reproved me gently.

"Would you deny your faith, my young friend? You were brought up on holy script. Has the breath of the age effaced it from your mind? Recall that passage in the Gospel, for it is decisive: 'Be ye not called Rabbi, for One is your Master; and ye are all brethren.'

"I too, in my youth, said 'Master' to academicians. I know what it means. It does not really signify according to its etymology, *Magister*— 'My good sir, you are worth thrice what I or any simple man is worth.' It means: 'You poor old pedant, your chatter is sheer drivel! Mere head-wagging! Tedious redundancy! You think you're the equal of the gods. Then don't delay in this low world. You have lasted long enough. It's high time to make place for the young.' Yes, that is what little rascals think while they are busy incensing old idols. Don't protest! I was the same

as you. Where has the time gone when I said 'Master' to Renan? And you will come quickly to where I am. And people will call you 'Master' some day. Yes, yes, 'Master' Brousson! That will happen to you sooner than you think. My mastership will then be the prey of worms, but on the banks of the Styx I shall rub my hands: I shall be avenged."

* * * * *

AURORA MUSIS AMICA

"Come to-morrow morning: we will get to work."

He points to the ceiling of his bedroom, decorated with an Italian allegory. A muse, reclining on an eiderdown of clouds, holds her tablets and stylus. She is a lady of superlatively massive charms. About her sports a ring of chubby cupids. In a corner of the picture Phœbus' horses stand champing ready to carry the god of day through the realms of heaven. And on a scroll is written: *Aurora musis amica.*

"Young man, take for your programme that motto: 'Dawn is the great friend of the muses.' Come then to-morrow morning at whatever hour you choose: the earlier the better. I am in haste to finish with my Maid. I sleep little and badly. You will be welcome at any time."

On the morrow behold me at the Villa Said at seven o'clock. Several times over I timidly touch

the little sixteenth-century bronze figure that connects with the electric bell. This trinket, which comes from Florence, is ill-adapted to modern inventions. The bell gives forth a pitiful sound. It too sleeps, like the whole household. I begin again. Nothing. The house seems dead. Third attack, a little less ceremonious. This begins to resemble an "elevation": I find myself back in the fair days of youth, when in alb and cassock I rang for the elevation of the host. But no God now makes his appearance. What's to be done? I fall to studying the door. It is set back as in a niche and inspires meditation. It is ornamented with archaic votive offerings. Two female bronzes, helmeted—Bellona, Minerva?—serve for handles. The diamond-headed nails, the hinges, the groove of the lock—all is of an ancient epoch. Renewed ringing, that stirs nothing but the silence. Seated on the doorstep I stare vacantly about me. It is June and radiant weather. The breath of spring from the Bois de Boulogne hard by touches me softly on the cheek. In those days the private road of the Villa Said was grassy and silent as a convent court—sumptuous houses have been built there since. A flock of shameless, brazen sparrows pilfer and peck among the dust. Time passes visibly, in the brilliant light, with the rustle as it were of a sheet of silk being unrolled. But here comes a little fellow, balancing two cans with a martial swing. It is the milkman. The sacrile-

gious creature, in a cloth cap, hangs a pot of milk on the head of Minerva. Another attack on the bell. It is the last. But it is sustained. If no one comes now, I shall leave this fabulous city of the Sleeping Beauty. Suddenly, a transformation scene: the ancient metal of the peep-hole in the door grates. There grates too, but more harshly, the sound of an uncivil voice. Through the interstices of the iron stray curl-papers protrude.

"What are you up to there?"

Clearly I am taken for a beggar or a tramp. I apologize, hat in hand. An eye examines me askance through the grating. At last Josephine recognizes me.

"It's you who've been making all this rumpus?" she grutches. "Have you tumbled out of bed?"

"But the Master told me to come at the earliest possible moment."

"The earliest——? As if he knew what he said! The earliest possible moment in Paris is nine o'clock. One can see you're from the country. Wait a minute, I'll open."

And grumbling the while she unbars the stubborn door. You cannot imagine the quantity of iron bars, steel chains, and bolts that protect the learned sleep of M. Bergeret. Now I am in the hall: I should say, the sacristy. In front of me against the pillar that supports the staircase is a Madonna with the Holy Child in her arms.

"Have you breakfasted?" asks Josephine, somewhat calmed.

"No."

"You're crazy! At your age you must feed yourself properly: nothing is so unwholesome as to go out fasting. Wait till you get a chest complaint and see if he'll bring you your gruel!"

"He? Who?"

Josephine puts a sly finger on her lips.

"Hush! He's still asleep."

"The Master?"

The word "Master" puts the maid in a fury.

"Master! Master! What's wrong with them all, to call him Master? Master of what, if you please? Of his soup when he's eaten it. Supposing he keeps it down, too! A fine Master, indeed! If I weren't there, he wouldn't be capable of so much as changing his pants."

She listens.

"He won't worry us till nine o'clock. He's an odd thing. He never knows what he wants."

So saying, she taps her forehead with her finger to indicate the weakness of her employer's brains. She disappears into the basement whence comes an odour of chocolate and toast.

I make acquaintance with the objects in the hall. At the bottom of the staircase, as in a well-kept hotel, hang, in order of their size, twenty or so keys from an oak panel decorated with the

Palmist's verse: *Nisi dominus custodierit domum.* "Except the Lord keep the house."

In fact these keys, these noble keys, are Roman, Neo-Latin, Gothic. The most modern is at least three hundred years old. A Greek goddess smiles across at the Madonna. On a little German table between two stools an épergne of old Marseilles offers its grapes and peaches of glittering majolica.

Josephine comes up again with a tray and in a Chinese cup the silkiest of smoking hot chocolate. The plate with the toast belonged to the India Company. From the India Company too is the handle of the knife for buttering it. The sugar-basin and the rest, down to the little silver spoon with a coat of arms, all bespeaks another age, regal and delicate, of exquisite taste. Josephine puts the tray on a stool. From her apron pocket she produces a bottle of medicated kola wine, of which all our great men have sung the invigorating virtues. She fills a glass which she decants almost by force into my astonished mouth.

"Just to keep the morning air out!"

One after another she herself demolishes a series of thimblefuls. She explains: "It costs him nothing. He has only to write: people send him packing-cases of it."

Enlivened by the tonic, she pours out her soul to me. It is a stormy and a bitter soul.

"You think it's gay for a woman like me to

live in the middle of all these antiquities?" And she calls the innumerable works of art to witness. "Just another drop? No! You're wrong. It would buck you up. So you want to be his secretary, do you? That's an idea, to be sure! Ah, if I wasn't there——! Have you a good handwriting? My boy, my poor boy, he was the one who would have made a good secretary. He always got the prize for round-hand, Gothic, and slanting too: he had the best writing in all his school. It was he who used to write the address of congratulation to their master. When we have time, I will show you letters that he wrote me on New Year's Day. And to think that there are people who come to ask *him* for his handwriting!"

An indignant finger points upstairs to where Anatole France sleeps.

"It's a scrawl! He's so clumsy. Why, he spends all his time scratching out and beginning again. Ah, yes! What's the muddle he makes worth compared to my poor boy's letters: you shall see."

She whimpers over her glass.

"He died at eighteen. He had such a future before him. If he had lived, I shouldn't be here, not much! You must know that I didn't always have misfortunes. I'm of a good family. My father was one of the leading drapers in Geneva. There were three pages at my wedding. But my

husband died and left his business in a tangle. So I had to earn my bread working for others."

Nine o'clock strikes.

"Take the letters," she orders. "It's time to wake him. If I wasn't here, he would never wake —'Master' indeed!"

She takes the tray. The chocolate has set fast. We go up the staircase, embellished with pious images, reliquaries, processional crosses, censers. Now we are on the first story with the bedroom on one side and the library opposite. Josephine knocks.

"Come in!" calls a cross, nasal voice. In the obscurity the voice pursues its lamentations.

"I thought you were dead. I should have survived it you know, but for my chocolate. Every one abandons me. Poor wretch that I am!"

The curtains are drawn aside and daylight enters caressingly into the strange room. A dais surmounted by a fourposter, and in the bed, whimsically bolstered up, the head beturbaned in a flowered Indian silk handkerchief, the bust enveloped in innumerable woolly garments, is a creature who makes you think of the *Malade Imaginaire* and also of the wolf, disguised as granny, in Little Red Ridinghood. The woolly garments are pushed aside. A beard flashes, vividly silver against the silk of the flowery kerchief. A mocking nose peeps out and sniffs.

"What's the weather like?"

"Seasonable weather."

"Cautious creature. Who is that with you?"

"M. Brousson."

"Ah, forgive me, my young friend, for inflicting this distressing spectacle on you. How have I slept? Like a galley-slave at the oar. This fever has not left me one hour's peace. I spent my time reading Tacitus and Casanova. If it goes on like this, I shall soon be fit for the undertaker."

"Don't believe a word of it," protests Josephine. "From my room upstairs I heard him snoring as loud as the last trump."

On the little Louis XIII table by the bed lie books with strange paper-knives stuck in them. A bottle of mineral water jostles against a pewter inkstand. Here are two church candlesticks with candles of yellow wax, half burnt. The candles are of the correct liturgical pattern. Josephine must buy them in some ecclesiastical store. It might almost be a mass. And their pious light has been illuminating the orgies of Casanova!

Deploring the while the miserable condition of man, the destined victim of old age, ugliness, impotence, and death, the Master bravely attacks his chocolate: the *brioches* and the toast make but short resistance. The keenness of his appetite gives the lie to his lamentations:

"I am a poor thing. What am I doing here, I should like to know? If only people would

leave me in peace! But all the bores in the world are determined to run me down."

* * * * *

THE FAIRY BATH

He points with disgust to the post spread on the eiderdown. Between two mouthfuls he rummages among letters, pamphlets, newspapers, and books. The inspection is soon over.

"To the bath! To the bath!" he cries, throwing the books on to the ground.

And as I stand amazed, he explains.

"Over there is my bathroom. In it, as befits, is a bath; but it is an enchanted bath. A fairy bath. You laugh, unhappy young man! If I told you that the bath was larger than the bathroom, you would not believe it. And yet it is the pure truth. Ah, that bathroom was the work of no ordinary architect! He who drew the plans of it had uncommon genius and, under colour of saving space, achieved a masterpiece; a bathroom, most dainty and practical, but a bathroom in which it is impossible to take a bath. So, as everything ends by being of some use, the bath, into which I cannot get, serves to receive the books that are showered on me. When it is full, a secondhand bookseller comes and empties it. We have fixed a price. Whoever the authors may be—verse or prose—it is fifty francs a bath. When he came for the first time, at the moment of striking the

bargain, I trembled a little. Fifty francs, thought I, is truly not much for carrying off that weighty heap of foolishness. He might have asked a hundred of me. But I was astounded when I saw him draw a note from his pocket; I thought it was I who had to pay him."

From the books he passes to the newspapers and letters. He puts on one side *Humanité,* the *Action,* and the *Figaro.*

"Come here, Mr. Secretary. This is for you."

And he hands me his letters. "A secretary must keep his master's secrets, mustn't he? Oh, the fine secrets that are there! I count on your faithfulness. Stay, no! Best count on no one's faithfulness. Throw all that rubbish into the fire. We shall be quicker done with it."

And as I hesitate, imagining that he is joking:

"Into the fire! Into the fire, I tell you. Unless you insist on replying to all those bores. After all, that's your affair."

* * * * *

THINK OF YOUR SOUL

All the same, he saves a letter from the *Auto-dafé.*

"This one," he explains, "I will read: it is from a madwoman. Look at the envelope. The address is multi-coloured: *Monsieur* is in blue; *Anatole France* in crimson; *de l' Académie Française* in green. Doubtless an allusion to uniform

of the Company of the Pont-des-Arts. I don't know this madwoman, but I am grateful to her all the same for troubling about my salvation. After all, is she mad? In any case she is not, on my soul, much more so than many others of her sex. And then, she is not pitiless; she begs me to save my soul. My case then is not past pardon. How much more cruel was Renan's correspondent: she wrote to him every day—'Hell exists.' Poor crazed thing! The earth exists and that is enough. I am so slack this morning, that I don't know if I shall get up."

So saying M. Bergeret leaps from bed with positively youthful agility. Josephine helps him into trousers made with huge feet attached to them [1] and a dressing-gown of thick, soft flannel. While she ties the cord, she consoles her master with the familiarity of a servant of classic drama:

"You're a stouter fellow than any of them. You will be always complaining, and you sleep like a cat and eat like a wolf."

She calls me to witness:

"You saw his legs? His body is like a child's. It's as white as chicken's flesh. Ah, there are a good few young ones that would be glad to be like him."

The compliment does not displease.

"Josephine," her master says in a softened tone,

[1] Such as Balzac also used to wear indoors.—J. P.

"you are a good soul and I am very glad to have you with me: you are a treasure."

"What cap will you wear?"

"Let's have a look at them."

* * * * *

THE SKULL-CAPS

Josephine produces a little basket full of the strangest caps. The great man takes them, holds them out on his fist, tries them on, looks in a Venetian mirror, rejects them, hesitates. And with reason: there is an immense collection. There are skull-caps of silk, of velvet, of Jouy cloth. Large caps, coming down over the ears like a papal bonnet. Others of sugar-loaf form like a fez. Others recall the dainty little cap, stuck like a scarlet wafer on the heads of choir-boys. Finally he chooses one in red-currant Jouy stuff. There are Chinese caps, mandarin caps, caps like pagodas.

"There," he says, "now we will work. I am not at home to anyone."

On the word, a string of visits begins.

* * * * *

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

This morning we took refuge in the great library, opposite the bedroom. There is a huge chimney-piece with a stone cowl. A piece of tapestry, caught back, reveals a kind of alcove. In a glass case, Tanagra figures, Etruscan vases, Egyptian pots. In another, precious emblazoned

bindings, and medals. Near the window a huge oak table. The whole room, like the rest of the house for the matter of that, resembles a sort of Victor Hugo museum. Before seating himself in the adjustable Louis XIV armchair Anatole France addresses a kind of prayer to the mutilated Venus, standing on a movable base, in the sanctuary formed by the tapestry. By means of a handle he turns the goddess. His fingers run over her breast and loins.

"See how lovely she is! She is the mistress of the house. I bought her in Rome, but she is of Greek origin; the shape and the quality too of the marble show that. Touch her: she puts up with anything, for she has no arms. It is real Paros! The satin of the very skin, you would say, wouldn't you? She is the mistress of the house. Let us put ourselves under her protection before we undertake the Maid. Was she really a maid, do you think? So much the worse for her. It took me a lot of trouble to extract my goddess from the Roman shop where she lay. You know there is a law in Italy that prevents the export of works of art? Happily I made the acquaintance of the Abbé de—— He was a Frenchman attached to the papal court and besides that, managed a sort of archæological agency. He could obtain, at one and the same time, audiences with the Pope, relics, marriage dispensations, separations, titles

of nobility, Venuses, Ganymedes and medals. He did not openly keep a shop, but made it his business to know about tourists who had arrived. After the fashion of lady go-betweens, he would indicate the antiquary, or the impoverished Roman noble willing to part with various valuables. He took his little commission from both parties. He undertook, in return you understand for a certain consideration, to get round the law and to pass into France, under the nose of the customs, the gods and goddesses of Olympus. He came to see me at my hotel with a list of divinities and addresses. His breviary was larded with photographs. *None* was marked with a Callipyge and *Prime* with a faun. He wanted frantically to sell me his faun. He thought my tastes must be Virgilian. The good abbé's chiefest treasure was an Androgynus after Bernini. You should have heard him sing the praises of his Androgynus. It was his pearl above price. But I wanted a Venus! He took me for a bumpkin, some ill-instructed amateur. I induced H——, of the *Assistance Publique,* to buy his faun playing a pipe, and he placed it in his library. He was mightily pleased with his faun. He said to me: 'When I look at that marble boy, I think of the twelve thousand boys of flesh and blood whom I must feed.' He is a gentleman who lays it on thick. As for me, I like my Venus best. Come! To work!"

* * * * *

THE MANUSCRIPT OF JOAN OF ARC

Anatole France takes his place at the massive oak table in the great adjustable armchair. He tinkles a little church bell. Enter Josephine, in a flurry.

"Bring the sack."

The servant returns dragging a sort of mattress after her.

"Leave it on the carpet. Do you know what that is, my young friend? That is the manuscript of *Joan of Arc*. You see that for some time to come you have your bread provided for. There must be well over a hundred-weight of it. All that rubbish is yours. Burn it, tear it to pieces, blue-pencil it. I don't want to look at it. This Maid is too much for me. You don't know where to get hold of her. She may have been a saint, but she was certainly a joker. However you start in to tell the story of her, you'll make everyone furious. Religious folk will cry out 'Sacrilege!' and atheists will say I am a bigot. I had shoved up all those papers into the garret along with the mice. Madame can't bear the mention of it. She is all for tales of to-day. She doesn't understand that the *Life of Joan of Arc* might be another *Life of Jesus*. Aren't they talking of canonizing the holy girl? We must be ahead of them, and race them to the church door. The point is to finish our liberal and republican monument before the priests

hoist her up on to their altars. There's no time to be lost. Just have a look over the manuscript."

I extract a mass of note-books from the sheet in which they are done up with safety-pins as tight as in a bathing costume. On to the carpet rain letters, envelopes, visiting cards, announcements of marriages and of deaths, newspaper cuttings, tradesmen's bills—ice-cream-men, pastry-cooks, picture framers. On the back of these scraps—for they are no more—are hasty notes, dates and references.

"You didn't expect such a mess, my young country gentleman? You see I work everywhere. Especially at railway stations. Madame has been taken with the itch for travelling. She can't stop for long anywhere. In the summer, it's Quiberon and Brittany. In the autumn, the Gironde and the châteaux on the Loire. Every day three churches, two museums, ten antiquity shops! In the winter she consents to bring her poor invalids to Paris. But once spring shows, into the sleeping-car we must jump and rush to Rome or Florence or Naples. I have become a vagabond. That does not interfere with writing light tales or stories of to-day. But it interferes very much with *Joan of Arc*. You will find there numbers of essential passages copied from goodness knows what books. But you are learned. You are young. You are patient. I place myself in your friendly hands. Have you a portfolio? Do you want to carry off a few

armfuls of my Maid with you? The first thing to do, I think, must be to divide up the work. Once the chapters are fixed, the book is ready written in my head. Our *Joan of Arc,* I foresee, will make two volumes. But we must arrange them so that one will lead up to the other. It is essential to string the reader on. Readers, I have noticed, often lack appetite when volume two is dished up. To prevent its selling less than number one, it must carry a full cargo. Twenty in one, fifteen in the other. Let us mark *Joan of Arc's* wrappers. Really we can't leave the Maid in that state on the carpet. There must be wrappers in this blotter."

He opens a magnificent Pontifical in red morocco with the arms of some prelate, turned to lay uses as a blotting-pad, and rages to find nothing.

"It's always the same thing! Josephine! Josephine! (He rings furiously.) No one can imagine the ingenuity of that female bereft of youth and beauty to prevent my working. There were reams of capital paper here for making wrappers. And now not a single sheet. You'll see, she has taken it for curl-papers or to make covers for jam-pots. Josephine! Josephine! (Fresh peals on the bell). She must be dead! I shan't recall her to life by ringing her knell. Let us make wrappers with these newspapers."

The wrappers made, we must mark them. On the vast table is a picturesque medley: small antique bronzes, Roman and mediæval fragments, an

imperious marble hand of an Emperor, several *agnus Dei's,* a tortoise full of wafers, three or four bells, a ruler made out of specimens of harmoniously graded malachite, a whole regiment of ink-pots of every age and land: pewter, lead, Chinese lacquer. They are all bone dry.

"I could have sworn it: not a drop of ink!"

It is always so with great writers. By dint of yelling and ringing, Josephine is summoned.

"Are you ill, sir?"

"No, I'm not ill; I'm annoyed."

"With whom?"

"With you. Not a drop of ink in the house!"

"You'll be saying next that I drink it."

She rolls down stairs and comes up again with a bottle. Victory! But on trying it we have to sing a lower tune: the ink turns out to be coffee. After the ink, it is the turn of the pens. The writing desks are decorated with noble tufts of goose-quills; but they scratch. There are also reed pens: but they splutter. The Maid's wrappers are put off till the morrow.

* * * * *

ORIGINAL KISSES

In a book-box on the Embankment, he has unearthed the *Kisses* and the *Elegies* of Jean Second. It is the Tissot edition. The subtitles set him talking. One reads: *Followed by several original kisses by P. F. Tissot.*

"What conceit! What an ignoramus a man must be to think that there remains anything original in that palpitating sphere! The first day of the creation after two or three hours passed in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve knew every bit as much as Second and Tissot. Then I haven't much faith in these vendors of patent kisses. Their mouths are so full of Greek and Latin that when they pass from theory to practice they must deposit little rounds of ink on their fair one's cheeks. But do they pass? That is the question. Erotic writers generally cool their heels pretty badly in real life. Their gallantries are of the ink-pot variety."

(Here follow some very unexpected criticisms of M. Paul Bourget's heroines.)

He goes on:

"Do you love caresses? Myself I thirst for them. I give you everything else: age, beauty, social rank. Duchess or dairy-maid—mere label! I hold to the opinion of our greatest royal voluptuary: 'No matter which of them!' said Louis XV to his valet, Lebel. 'But take her first to the bath and to the dentist.'

"That monarch was a great man. Whatever may be said of him, he deserves the title of 'Beloved.' The bath and the dentist! There you have the whole thing. The bath spells hygiene, the only moral code of love. The body must be ready for the caress, for you are not, I trust, one of those lenten fellows who would salute the fair sex with

a little peck on the cheek, fit for a relic or a sacred vessel. As for me, I demand Venus in all her beauty. The face! Good for relations, friends, husband, or children. By dint of such domestic usage it becomes hardened. The down vanishes, the surface grows insensible. Lovers have the right to more originality; so to say, to first editions. Now I know the vanity of all human learning. What useless reading, what crushing knowledge for a life so brief and passed in the midst of dunces! Why take all this tiresome luggage for so short a journey? People praise my learning. I no longer want other learning than in the realm of love. Love is now my unique, my particular study. It is to that I devote the flickering remains of passion. If only I could write all that the little god inspires in me! Dismal prudery reigns in literature, a prudery more silly, cruel, and criminal than the Holy Inquisition. For me now, a woman is a book. Remember, I told you there are no bad books. By dint of seeking through the pages, you end by finding a passage that repays you for your trouble. I seek, my friend, I seek diligently."

So saying he wets his finger and in the air, feverishly and caressingly, turns pages of imaginary parchment. He goes on, his eyes sparkling with youth:

"When I have the joy of holding in my arms one of God's creatures, I read the masterpiece, line

by line. Not a stop, not a comma do I miss. Sometimes I lose my spectacles over it!"

* * * * *

TACT AND TASTE

Luncheon at Madame's. No guests. We arrive at half-past one. "We had given up hopes of you," she says. "I thought you were still presiding at some subversive meeting," says Monsieur. "Still, revolutionaries must lunch like every one else. Indeed they have bigger appetites."

We sit down. The *hors-d'œuvre* appear, tasteless.

Monsieur. "I read your article in the *Action*. You write in the *Action* now? You have given up *Humanité?* Why? I understand! You are out of love with *Humanité* because it has no more money. Poor *Humanité!* I didn't understand a word in your article this morning."

France. "I am not surprised. It was not for you that I wrote it."

Monsieur. "Of course! I'm too stupid, aren't I, to understand your masterpieces! Look here now. If you think some one a mere clod, you can't lunch with him every day for twenty years."

France. "Just what I have said to myself every day for twenty years."

Madame throws herself between them to prevent a clash. She reprimands both sides.

Madame. "Now no politics, I beg. Spare

me your political squabbles. Keep them for the smoking-room. Remember that ladies are present."

France. "I will take care, Madame, not to forget it." (He bends, interrupts swallowing, wipes his lips and moustaches with a napkin and kisses Madame's hand.)

The entrée follows, tasteless, like the *hors-d'-œuvre.*

Monsieur. "Have you read X's article in the *Gaulois?* There's thumping smart stuff for you!"

And he thumps on the table.

France. "Smart stuff! Smart stuff! Stuffing is a term used in cookery, of certain dishes stuffed and then roasted: stuffed geese for example. Who are the geese in this case? The readers of your paper?"

Madame. "Look out! I warn you! Politics again!"

Monsieur. "Anyway the article is by a patriot and a good Frenchman."

France. "Yes, one of those good Frenchmen who can never write French."

So we come to the roast. Munching their drumsticks, the two suddenly feel imbued with the warmth of friendship. They make anxious inquiries about each other's health.

Monsieur. "My dear France, you really should not take so much sauce. Rich food is bad for you. Anyone can see that your liver is out of

order. You're positively yellow to-day. You might be made of gingerbread."

France. "What is there changed in your appearance, my dear fellow? Have you been breaking your teeth? Look, Madame, he has lost a tooth. An incisor, too. Scientists tell us now that the incisors are the most useful of all the teeth for complete mastication. You should really look after yourself. Always a bad sign, at your age, to lose a tooth."

Monsieur. "And you have got good, sharp teeth, thank the Lord! But I wouldn't have your bile-duct for something."

France. "Who said I wanted to part with it?"

From the chicken to the sweet, the two hold a mutual medical inspection. They count each other's wrinkles, white hairs, loose teeth, signs of weakness, blemishes. They diagnose the most recondite complaints. To listen to them you would think the lawyer and priest needed without an instant's delay and the undertaker to follow. Madame makes a final effort to blow away this hospital atmosphere. To change the subject, she begins to praise Dr. P——'s collection. She was looking at it only yesterday. "What Tanagras! What Chinese curios! He really is a man of great taste." This diversion annoys Monsieur.

Monsieur. "Taste! What is taste, I should like to know? Anyone who is rich has taste. You

can always get others to have it for you. You only have to go to antiquity shops or dealers who have taste. Taste indeed! What nonsense! Why, I have taste."

France. "There are people who have taste but no tact, for one is possible without the other. Taste is a feeling for beauty; tact, for what is fitting."

Monsieur. "Certainly, France. You have taste. You have tact. As much of the one as of the other. And you, my dear, have you taste?"

Madame hesitates before replying. She smiles with an air of victory. She takes her eternal lorgnette of white and gold from the table. She touches the spring, breathes upon the glasses, wipes them with her napkin, places the instrument on her nose, looks for a moment at her husband, and says pointedly:

"True, dear, I did not always have taste."

She unharnesses her nose from the lorgnette, breathes once more on the glasses, wipes them, replaces them, and contemplates Anatole France with ecstasy.

"But, thank heaven, I have acquired it."

* * * * *

STEREOSCOPIC VIEWS

Coffee is served in the red drawing-room on the first floor. A stereoscope with views of antiquity serves for a distraction. It is Anatole

France who slips the plates into the box. The box is of Chinese lacquer. At every view he intones a kind of chant: "The basilica of St. Peter, mother of all the churches. Two hundred churches in one! Thirty-five doors! A hundred and fifty chapels! Fifty palaces! Sixteen triumphal arches! Thirty basilicas—not to be confounded with the royal plant, basil, that perfumes the humble cobbler's stall. A thousand pictures! A thousand statues! The Coliseum! Founded by Vespasian, inaugurated by Titus, embellished by Domitian. At the inauguration five thousand wild beasts were sacrificed to King Populace. It could hold forty-five thousand spectators."

Madame. "Are you quite sure of that?"

France. "As sure as of Gospel truth."

Madame. "Oh, in that case! Forty-five thousand then: I won't contest it. Was it there that the Christians were thrown to the wild beasts?"

France. "There and elsewhere. Only they didn't throw enough."

Madame. "That's a very sanguinary sentiment."

France. "Sanguinary? Sanguinary! Look close at the plate. Do you see that breach in the wall, there, on the right?"

Madame. "Yes. It looks just like a pie with a bit cut out of it."

France. "And who cut Diocletian's pie? Who were crueller enemies to the Coliseum than the cruellest of all old men, old Father Time himself?

The Christians, Madame! The Christians. I don't know how many churches, chapels, and cardinal's palaces were not built with the stones torn from the sides of the hapless circus. If all that Jewish rabble had been thrown to the lions, the monument would be intact. Our souls too would be intact. The joy of our youth would not have been nipped in the bud by the trash of their most gloomy of gods."

Madame. "Come, don't excite yourself. All that happened a very long time ago. Will you have some liqueur?"

France. "A little Chartreuse, please. The Arch of Titus——"

He recites:

> The day begin and the day end,
> And Titus ne'er see Berenice,
> Nor I, the livelong day, see Titus.[1]

He draws our attention to some plates worthy, in his view, of special note. They are beautified by a lighting device, and represent Vesuvius in eruption and fête by night at Versailles. Streams of light are imitated by little holes made with pins.

France. "Perhaps you are surprised, my young friend, to see me play the part of a guide, but there is an illustrious example. Remember Voltaire at Madame du Châtelet's. He was show-

[1] Que le jour recommence et que le jour finisse
Sans que jamais Titus puisse voir Bérénice
Sans que de tout le jour, je puisse voir Titus.

ing the magic lantern. And in the obscurity the divine Emilie lent an ear to the whispering of the cold Saint-Lambert. She had a child by him—the child, in fact, of the magic lantern. But here I've got my eye on you!"

* * * * *

CINNA ON THE PHONOGRAPH

After the stereoscope, the phonograph.

"What disc shall we have? Sarah Bernhardt?"

"For Mercy's sake, no! She is an embodied nasal twang."

"Mounet-Sully?"

"Heavens above! He bellows like a stag in love."

"L——?"

"No, no. Spare me that baa-ing sheep."

"Paul Mounet?"

"He bores me stiff. The man's a blacksmith."

Finally the monologue of Cinna, interpreted by X, is put on. The mill has already ground out fifty alexandrines or so. The nasal voice continues:

Even to-day again my soul irresolute
Would bid me surrender my power absolute:
Of Maxime and of thee alone I've ask'd counsel,
But it's thine, despite him, to which I've held well.[1]

Anatole France leaps from his chair and stops

[1] Qu' aujourdhui même encor mon âme irresolue
Me pressant de quitter ma puissance absolue,
De Maxime et de toi, j'ai pris les seuls avis,
Et ce sont, malgré lui, les tiens que j'ai suivis.

the mechanism, at the risk of breaking it. He is crimson in the face. He prances about. He yells:

"Ah, scoundrel! Perfect ass! Did you hear? It's blasphemy! Sacrilege!

> Of Maxime and of thee alone I've asked counsel,
> But it's thine, despite him, to which I've held well.

That pumpkin of an actor puts the emphasis on 'despite him'! The booby thinks it fine to make a pause, a kind of organ-stop, the wrong way round. What a simpleton! The emphasis is on the 'thine.' Actor? He's a greenhorn, a flat. He plays the classics with a romantic swagger. He has no sense of shades. Augustus—he? Augustus the circus clown! He would be hissed in a suburban fit-up!"

"At the Comédie française," remarks Madame, "all the house applauds him."

"The Comédie française? It's a veritable Vale of Rest! An old-age almshouse!—Under cover of honouring the classics, they flay them. Just think: what does Augustus want? To cajole Cinna. Hence all his specious persuasions:

"'But it's THINE, despite him, to which I've held well.' Nothing could be plainer. A child of seven would understand."

Leaning with his back against the mantelpiece he declaims Augustus' mercy. He is really moved, when he forgives. But grammatical criticism makes him himself again.

* * * * *

ATTILA BLEEDS AT THE NOSE

"The language of Corneille," he remarks, "has aged greatly. It has grown crooked, like Louis XIII's column. Voltaire, in his day even, found it necessary to write a commentary. Are we more lettered than they were in the times of Arouet? Yet society folk applaud Corneille to the echo at the Comédie française. He is the poet of patriotism and Christianity! They applaud him, I'm very much afraid, without understanding him. To profit by him they would need the services of a philological commentator. The language of the illustrious Norman is no longer in use. Far from it indeed. For instance:

The hapless success of the great king Nicanor.[1]

"Isn't that enough to make the stalls lose their wits? Hapless success, indeed! 'Success' here is used in the sense of events which succeed one another.[2] We don't use the word like that. When he is not obscure, Corneille is odd. Sometimes he lacks taste. When he arrives at a climax, he often falls into triviality. Do you remember Attila's bleeding at the nose?"

"Do leave Attila's bleeding at the nose alone! It's anything but tragic."

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[1] Le malheureux succés du grand roi Nicanor.

[2] The English word "success," like the French "succés," was used in the same sense until the eighteenth century.—J. P.

"No, no. I insist on my bleeding at the nose. It is most significant.

> The blood which sent the prince to his tomb
> And each day is distilled afresh from his brain,
> Punishes his parricide and each day afresh
> Pays an astonishing tribute to that of the brother.[3]

"What do you say to the distillation from his brain? Now at the Théâtre Français it would be swallowed like a pill. The spectator, cradled by the purring sound of the alexandrines, catches on an average one line in every three, when he is paying attention. On his side the actor, who hardly understands a word of the language of Louis XIII's day, juggles away one line in every ten or disfigures passages at random. I remember hearing an actress recite the line:

> From his palpitating body the dripping thorns.

She thought it was common, and by her own leave this charming and ingenious prig substituted 'rose' for 'thorn.'[4] And she pronounced it 'reoses' into the bargain. Everyone round me was delighted. 'Dripping reoses!' What boldness of expression! What a genius Corneille must have been, and so modern! I was the solitary person to notice the

[3] Le sang qu' après avoir mis ce prince au tombeau,
On lui voit chaque jour, distiller du cerveau,
Punit son parricide, et chaque jour vient faire
Un tribut étonnant à celui de ce frère.

[4] Fr. Avait substitué "rose" à "ronce."

substitution. Look here. Suppose you had confided an important secret to me—a secret that weighed me down until I no longer had the strength to keep it to myself. Well, I might stick it into a speech in a play for the Comédie française. The actor or actress would bawl my secret every night to three thousand persons who would not catch a word of it and would yet make the house rock with applause. So I should be relieved without having broken faith."

"Forewarned is forearmed. I shall keep my secrets to myself. One imbecile, one inattentive spectator would be enough to discover them. Besides I have no secret, as you know well; whereas you——"

"What can you mean? My whole life is yours."

He kisses her hand. Then Madame, tranquillized:

"You have the secret of style. Every man of letters admits it."

* * * * *

IN CLASS

Three o'clock strikes.

"Enough of play," says Madame. "Come, to work!"

She goes up to the second floor. Anatole France, behind her, mounts without enthusiasm. He looks like a boy being taken by his nurse to school.

Between the linen-cupboard and Madame's

bedroom is a huge room, well-lit and with but little furniture.

From the ceiling is suspended a little boat, the model of a yacht. It recalls the votive offerings that sailors hang after a storm from the vaulted roofs of chapels. Two windows. No paper on the walls, but papers everywhere else. On the mantelpiece lie books and note-books and proofs, and proofs and note-books and books lie pell-mell on the carpet. It is June, but the fire is lit and the room is like a hothouse. Madame seats herself at a little school-desk between the fireplace and the wall, opposite the window.

On her desk are a bunch of flowers, a bag of chocolates, and a box of sweets. She and her sulky little dog, with its red morocco collar and gold bell, have ensconced themselves in a befringed and betasselled low Louis Philippe armchair.

Anatole France strolls nonchalantly to his writing-table on the other side of the fireplace in the window corner. He instals himself in a kind of Gothic throne covered with a maze of heraldic devices. On the table, which is in the same Gothic style that hails from the Faubourg St. Antoine or the chapel of Dreux, is a medley of objects. Here is a reproduction by some electric process of the silver goblet found at Bosco Reale with a ring of dancing cupids and skeletons. There are seals, match-boxes, boxes of pens, and of throat lozenges; there again, a Breton doll, a ghastly crystal

inkpot, the sort of penwiper you might win in a raffle embroidered with beads and flowers, and here a crystal paper-knife and a crystal paper-weight, all complete, a schoolboy's leather pen-box with the Eiffel Tower and a captive balloon painted on it, medals, and two or three pairs of scissors and a huge pot of gum, and an astonishing metal pen-holder with the monogram A. F. on it surrounded by a sprig of ivy, just like the presents people give to children being confirmed. Behind his head is a set of pine book-shelves. On one, within reach of his hand, are Littré, Godefroy, Darmesteter and the *Grande Encyclopédie.* Above is a complete set of Renan. Below is a row of folio volumes—Lacurne de Sainte-Palaye, Moreri, and so on. Behind the others, red in the face and breathing hard, comes Monsieur. His writing-table is in front of Anatole France's, at the other end of the room, near the other window. Between the windows is another set of shelves of pine wood, full of books. The writing-table is of the American variety. Monsieur sits down heavily on a cane-bottomed armchair with an indiarubber cushion in it.

Madame is eating a sweet. She throws one to Anatole France, who catches it in the air. Monsieur grumbles. He doesn't like being left out.

France. "In this world one must know how to cry. There is a Spanish proverb that says: 'The babe that doesn't cry gets no milk.' You

cried and Madame offers you the milk of her lovingkindness."

Monsieur. "Much I care for your rubbishly Spanish proverbs." He takes the telephone. "The markets are appallingly weak."

Madame (lisping with the sweet in her mouth). "How are Rio Tintos?"

Monsieur. "Down. Still falling."

Madame. "You bought, I suppose?"

Monsieur. "Of course."

France (echoing). "Of course."

* * * * *

I HAVE FORGOTTEN MY SKULL-CAP

He looks preoccupied. One by one he explores his pockets. He turns out his keys, his spectacles, his purse.

France. "I have forgotten my skull-cap at the Villa Said."

Monsieur. "He has forgotten his skull-cap!"

Madame. "Well, ring then! We'll send François for it."

France. "That oaf will never find——"

Madame. "You have at least a hundred skull-caps. A perfect collection. A blind man could bring you a dozen of them."

France. "But there are caps and caps! I feel all feverish and shivery to-day. I cannot work bareheaded."

Madame. "What a petty tradesman's habit to

be sure! You inherited that mania for wearing a cap from your father who kept a bookshop. Nothing could be uglier or more unhealthy; those skull-caps are absolute nests of colds in the head."

France. "Well, it's too late to change me. Without my cap, I am good for nothing."

He rises.

Madame. "You're not going, I trust? You haven't written a single word! Really one would think you were a boy of fifteen and not an Immortal."

France. "Give me fifteen, and a plague on your immortality."

He seats himself again, takes a newspaper and folds it in the shape of a gendarme's hat, which he sticks on his head like a printer. Next he erects a barricade of dictionaries between him and the enemy, that is to say, Madame. The rampart once built with the help of volumes of Littré and the *Grande Encyclopédie,* he rests against the heraldic back of the Louis Philippe throne, folds his hands over his stomach, opens his mouth, and sleeps. You would think he had been positively thirsting for sleep. The paper hat insensibly falls over his eyes. A folio from the *Trésor de la Basse Latinité* serves him as a footstool.

Madame scribbles. Monsieur makes calculations. I read proofs before the fire. The heat in the room is enough to make a lizard sleepy. Suddenly Madame detects a nasal lamentation.

Madame. "Monsieur France! Monsieur France! I can't see you. What's that rampart in front of you? Have you turned hermit? Are you dead?"

Monsieur. "No, my dear. He's asleep; he's snoring. It would really be a pity to wake him when he's so happy."

* * * * *

TWO CONVERSATIONS

One of the most impudent and persistent legends about Anatole France in old age was unquestionably that of M. Bergeret in the character of a brilliant censor, like Diderot or Rivarol. According to persons who make a profession of literary indiscretions the Master's conversation glittered like fireworks. Rockets of wit, catherine-wheels of brilliance, cascades of quotation. You left him in a maze of admiration.

The fact is that the illustrious author had two kinds of conversation, one for show purposes, the other for private. What may be called the "official" kind could be classified like pieces of music. How often have I not heard Madame, on Sundays, say to France: "Tell us such and such a story." He needed no pressing but obediently gave the performance asked for. When he had finished Madame appraised it like a master giving marks after a recitation in school. "Good. Very good," she would say. "Perfect! Excellent! You have

surpassed yourself." Or, "You were not at your best. The other day you gave us that with much more go. To-day you cut it short. You forgot such-and-such a detail."

Often, indeed, Egeria made him say it over again, and noted the variations.

In these show conversations the stories followed one another in an immutable sequence. The points were brought out at fixed places. Changes of tone were introduced. In appropriate passages the soft pedal was freely used. The end was intoned with sacerdotal emphasis. Whatever might happen, whoever might enter while he was speaking—were it Solomon or the Queen of Sheba, or did the Countess Z. go off in a faint—the Master continued with the insensibility of a phonograph.

Those who were frequent spectators could easily foretell from the first selection what was coming. Some edifying tale of lily-white purity from the *Golden Legend* would lead by antithesis to the blackguardly prowess of Casanova. This celebrated libertine takes us to Italy, where we meet with Vasari and the great painters at the Grand Duke Cosimo's. There will be anecdotes about Benvenuto Cellini and Michael Angelo, and the recitation of a sonnet by Barbier on the latter.

Sad was thy visage, wasted thy forehead

When France reaches the last lines:

Slowly didst thou die, full of glory and of grief—

he seems deeply moved and blows his nose. There is a short entr'acte for applause. The spectators uncross their legs.

Another sonnet follows on Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, or Correggio. The Master is fond of these interludes. He fancies himself in tragedy. In fact, his stage voice sounds as if it came from the tomb.

Now we are in Rome in the era of Marcus Aurelius, then in that of René the diplomatist under Cardinal Fesch. We are present with Chateaubriand at Madame de Beaumont's deathbed. Thence we dash back posthaste to Paris in time to throw ourselves at the feet of Madame Récamier at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. A certain physical imperfection in this divine creature brings the conversation back with a jump to the Maid of Orleans, who, it seems .... And this goes on as long as you like or, rather, as long as Madame likes. She plays upon Anatole France as upon a spinet. It is enough to murmur certain names—Chateaubriand, Hugo, Corneille, Rodin—to set him going. These show conversations are the delight of paragraphists and journalists short of copy. However the wind blows, whatever the banner under which they are ranged, they always—since the Master professes every opinion by turn and all with equal fire—find something to keep the pot boiling.

But he who only knows this Bergeret, got up

in his Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, knows very little of the real Anatole France.

There is besides quite another kind of conversation in private. It is laborious, uneasy, grating, breathless, discordant, full of contradictions and of what painters call " repentances," with—"Don't you think so?—All the same—It's possible that—You must not think—After all, we mustn't exaggerate—No doubt that is true, but so is the contrary——" This conversation, full of intellectual confidences, is the exact opposite of the " official " fireworks. If it lacks the majesty of the latter, at least it escapes its monotony. You never know where he will go next: no more does he. But he does not care to indulge in this style with chance acquaintances. One person is enough to make his audience, a part, moreover, which is easy to play. Almost all the time it is a soliloquy.

Anything will do as a starting-point: some trivial remark on a visitor or a woman passing by, some phrase culled from the papers or a book, the name of some public man or woman of fashion, a curio bought the day before or awaiting purchase. All these serve as texts—or pretexts to open the tap. The beginning is heavy and awkward. Often you are astounded by the credence lent by the wittiest man of his time to the silliest tales. But they are in reality Demosthenes' stones to him. Their use is to get through the moments of spluttering. For the first gush of the most limpid

of our writers, one might almost say, is clouded and muddy. Little by little the flow clears itself, and becomes a stream, with brilliant eddies, of golden spangles, quotations, reminiscences, epigrams, and analogies. From a tiny, twisted screw, made from the page of an almanack, France will bring out all his life and all his library—it is often the same thing.

Once launched he is tireless—pitiless, rather—pitiless to his listener. Frequently at the end of one of these conversations lasting several hours at a stretch I have felt as worn out as if I had carried all the folios in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in a pile on my head.

* * * * *

THE FAIRY UMBRELLA

Whatever the weather may be he carries an umbrella. Long, long ago he had a stick.

"It was a piece of male cane. Have you noticed that all canes are male, at least when you buy them? The males, most rightly, are more highly prized than the females, and much dearer. That is highly flattering to us men. Wherever I went I used to put on my stick a ring with the name of the place and the date. A gold or silver ring, according to the state of my finances. In the end my cane was like a bishop's crozier. I was proud of it. Heaven punished me: it was stolen. That is why, instead of a stick, I take my umbrella.

How do you like my umbrella? Good gracious, how lukewarm you are! Why, I bought it in Rome under the shadow of Agrippa's Pantheon. You will say that it is worth no more on that account. It cost, I remember, 18 frs. 95c. See how strong it is. This metal frame has affronted without blenching the chill wind of Mount Sorratus that used to give Horace colds and unbonneted all the husbands in the town. The stuff, you guess rightly, is made of very mixed silk in which there is a goodly portion of so-called 'American silk.' Once it was black, but under the rain it became plum-coloured. It's not the more ugly for that. To be quite candid, my umbrella is German. At Rome, except for the little restaurants, all the shops are German—bookshops, chemists' shops, and bazaars. This German umbrella is a fairy. That is not surprising, for Germany is the land of fairies. If I did not fear to enrage those fantastical damsels of destiny, I could tell you stories that would make you respect my umbrella. But you do not seem to me worthy of such confidences. Know, nevertheless, that it cannot be lost. I leave it daily at art dealers, or in bookshops, or looking at engravings. My Roman umbrella is always brought back to me. Now how does that come about? Is it that art dealers are the honestest men alive, when it is a question of umbrellas? Maybe. Maybe also, by reason of its ugliness. If it were

more elegant, it would tempt some one. Since I lose it three times a week and invariably give two francs when it is brought back to me, how much is my fairy umbrella worth since I bought it under the shade of the Pantheon six years ago? I have no head for mathematics—alas that it should be so."

* * * * *

THE CREED

"The very first article of the Ten Commandments makes me jib: 'Thou shalt have none other gods, but Me.' No! All the gods, all the temples, all the goddesses."

"Time keeps nothing that you make without his help."

"Beware of phrases that are too spacious and too melodious. At first they lull you gently, then they send you to sleep."

"The most beautiful subjects? The simplest and the least clad."

"When a thing has been said and well said, have no scruple: take it and copy it. Give references? Why should you? Either your readers know where you have taken the passage and the precaution is needless, or they do not know and you humiliate them."

"Caress your phrase tenderly: it will end by smiling at you."

* * * * *

SUNDAY PLEASURES

Sunday morning is guest time at the Villa Said; but only for intimate friends and those invited. These sittings are less for show than those of Wednesday. The first part of the reception takes place in the library; the second, in the bedroom, where Anatole France goes back to dress. He puts on for the occasion a frock-coat and a starched shirt with a stick-up collar. Instead of his blue butterfly tie, spotted with white peas, he sports a breastplate of brocaded silk, blue too, this. Somewhere in the waves of the stiffly lined silk he half drowns a pearl pin. He dresses with complete composure in the presence of visitors. Josephine hands him his shirt; it recalls the "petit lever" of Versailles. The conversation is not interrupted. Conversation? It is a series of soliloquies. The monologue has but one moment of respite: M. Bergeret is brushing his teeth.

The visitors once gone, we make for the Avenue Hoche. As a rule the Master is out of humour. The sight of the Sunday folk exasperates him. "How much better these people look in their working clothes," he remarks. "They look as if they had been hired out ready fitted with their thirty-five-franc suits. We should be the same if we wore a workman's blouse all the week." He is loud in pity over the lot of the little chaps dressed up as sailors.

"Look at that family. They are obviously small people in some Government office, or else dairymen. They have tricked themselves out to go to dinner with a relation, or a friend, or a colleague. At all costs they feel they must eclipse their host. Mother has put on her best silk dress and mantle. Father has dressed himself up as on that terrible day of his wedding. But their main effort is directed to their darling. Poor little chap! Look at him stretching his fingers in his new gloves! He has gloves and patent leather shoes and a whistle on a cord, the symbol of authority. Like most of the children in Paris he is anæmic. He is bandy-legged and lop-eared. On his cap is inscribed: *Invincible* or *Bellerophon.* Mother is as flowery as the month of May. How proud Father is of her and of his son. It is the Trinity of resplendent middle-class contentment. Well, and do you know how it will end? In a quarrel and a smacking. If only it was Mother to get the smacking! Not a bit of it. It's the wretched *Invincible* who will catch it on his innocent little behind. It's on his seat that all the failures of the day will be totted up. Oh, there'll be no want of pretexts! He will have messed his breeches, his new breeches! If only it had been the old ones! He will have lost one of his gloves! He will have behaved badly at table. He will have asked twice for things he liked and refused those he didn't.

He will have made improper remarks. That's to say he will have repeated what he has heard Father and Mother say. There is nothing so frightful for a small boy in Paris as a Sunday outing. I know that."

* * * * *

AT FLORA'S

In the Avenue de Wagram we go into a florist's. Anatole France compares her to Flora. "In Latin: *Flora.* In Greek: *Chloris.* Eternal spring is here." He buys a bunch of Parma violets for five francs, and a bunch of simple violets for one. The price never varies. The ordinary violets are for me: "Give them to your little girl friend from an old disappointed fellow."

Arriving at the Avenue Hoche, he runs lightly upstairs to the study and puts down his hat and his bunch of flowers.

* * * * *

AN INTERROGATORY

We are at table. The tone changes to that of an examining magistrate. It is the interrogatory of an accused man. Madame wields her lorgnette like a sceptre or, if you will, like the scales of Thetis.

"Who did you have this morning?"

"No one."

"No one? That's to say, twenty toadies, beggars, people who want prefaces, dedications,

decorations, recommendations, autographs, go-betweens from ladies and cabinet ministers."

"No one, I tell you. Ask Brousson."

"Heavens forefend! You only have to look at his nose! No women?"

"Alas, no!"

"Women of letters, perhaps?"

"I don't count them as women."

"You like all sorts, you have so little taste."

"It is here that I acquire it again."

He kisses her hand.

"For once in a way then, you were let work in peace. Quite a change. And what did you do?"

"Brousson and I spent the morning with Joan of Arc."

"Brousson and he spent the morning with Joan of Arc! How innocent! How pure!" She turns to her husband. "You hear? With Joan of Arc, with the Maid!"

Monsieur. "They're a fine couple! Look at their faces. They understand one another like thieves at a fair. Who knows, perhaps there was a Maid at the Villa Said this morning? But she wasn't from Orleans!"

Madame. "How many pages did you write?"

France. "Oh, I can't say. At the first go off, you know, one spoils a lot of paper. Now that I think——"

Madame. "Now that you think, you have been wasting your morning and your health.

Don't gnaw the rind of that melon like a rabbit. Take all you want. Have another slice."

* * * * *

THE ALIBI

After dinner, behind his hand, to me:

"Poor Joan of Arc! She is the source of an endless quarrel. Now here is a miracle—though I shan't go and tell them at Rome! For me, the Maid is the Great Wall of China. Madame has invaded my life. Nothing is safe from her. But Joan of Arc disgusts her. She is my asylum, my sacred wood, my Arcadia, my vale of Tempe. When Madame gets peevish, off I go with my Maid! So you see why I am not in a hurry over her. It is a painstaking task. But most of all, it forms an excellent pretext, in fact, an alibi."

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THE CARMELITE

While coffee is being served, he goes up to the study. Madame is receiving her guests below; above, he takes the opportunity for a siesta, his head reclining priest-like on the Louis Philippe throne, his mouth open. But at the least sound, he is all alive with his smile and pen ready.

"Master, Madame has sent me to say that your presence is awaited downstairs. The drawing-room is full of people panting for you like deer for the cooling stream."

"What a bore! Does Madame take me for a

performing ape? Who is there? A lot of prigs? Jewesses?"

"Madame So-and-so is there, etc. Madame So-and-so——"

"Ah, the Carmelite has come? I will be down at once."

He has a weakness for the Carmelite, whom he has so baptized on account of her predilection for sombre dresses. The Carmelite is a widow. She has lovely shoulders. Madame detests her.

Anatole France takes his overcoat, his hat, and his bunch of violets. He goes heavily down the staircase, affecting the tired gait of one who has come from the other end of the town. Now he is in the drawing-room.

At the sight of him the talk dies down and chairs are respectfully pushed back. He advances with shy little steps towards the gilded armchair where Madame is throning it with her back to the light. Two paces from the lady of the house, he performs a sort of rapid bow. He brings his heels together, for all the world like a conjurer preparing to do a trick, and from the bottom of his hat produces the bunch of Parma violets. First he lays them to his lips, then to his heart. Then, with the air of a tiny tot on New Year's Day, he lisps the consecrated Sunday speech, that all the guests await.

"Madame, as I was passing close by, I could not refrain from coming to offer you my homage

and these flowers. They will express, better than I, my deep admiration."

Madame receives this incense with the impassiveness of an idol.

"Charming," she says, "charming. Now take your place in front of the fire. Talk so that everyone may hear."

In a flash, the Master glides, eel-like, from group to group. Under colour of shaking outstretched hands he reaches a window. From window to window he gains the end of the gallery, where he finds the Carmelite. They are buried in whispered confidences and fancy themselves forgotten by everyone, when suddenly the shrill voice of the lady of the house:

"Where is Monsieur France? Monsieur Brousson, where is Monsieur France?"

Finally she discovers him in his corner, in the act of pouring something very special into the Carmelite's ear.

"Madame....!" cries the hostess. "Why have you imprisoned Monsieur France? He looks so unhappy! Give him back his freedom. Monsieur France, come, escape! Come here and tell us the story of Bornier."

Anatole France with an air of resignation returns to the fireplace, leans up against the marble mantelpiece, and rushes through the tale. General applause.

"He is divine! Exquisite! Oh, there's no one like him! Did you follow?"

Madame curls a disdainful lip:

"You told it much better the other day."

* * * * *

ABSTRACTED AND DISTRACTED

This morning he is full of youthful enthusiasm. He dashes through his toilet, abbreviates his ablutions, buttons his boots himself.

"Above all don't ring for Josephine. She is so particular and so talkative. She never gets through. The weather is enchanting. Away with Joan of Arc for to-day! It will be delightful for a walk. Walking is a pleasure, 'chief among insipid pleasures,' says Voltaire. We will profit by this golden morning to go afoot as far as the Institute. We will stroll along the Rue Mazarine and the Rue de Seine, and look at the little shops and the second-hand dealers. What an attractive district it is, with its booksellers and print shops, and old furniture and works of art! It is a veritable museum out-of-doors. All along the Embankment on one side you have a display of curios in the windows. On the other against the parapet is a library some kilometres long, a library of a fantastic and unexpected kind of whose richness its curators are unaware."

He is ready. We descend the staircase on tiptoe. He opens the door with the precaution of a lover or a burglar.

"Don't wake the harpy, squatting in her basement."

He strides in haste down the steps of the porch, dragging me as I hang on his arm, and rushes towards the avenue. We are already half way down the drive. Suddenly a door opens behind us and a voice barks:

"Sir! Where are you going, sir?"

He redoubles his pace.

"Pay no attention to the hooting of that owl who knows not Minerva. Let us try to escape from the ancient tyrant. What does she want with me now?"

The clamour redoubles.

"Sir! Sir! Don't you hear? He is going to Madame's in his nightshirt!"

"Let us fly! Under colour of taking care of me, that wench makes me a laughing-stock. You would think from listening to her that I was her ward or fit to send to Sainte-Perrine. Yesterday, in the presence of ten persons, she wanted me to change my pants! Vanity—all her zeal is vanity. She brandishes my shirt or my vest, as it were a flag in a demonstration. She wants to show every one that she is as vigilant as I am ingenious. A great danger threatens me: I often long to throttle her. Ah, if we could only find a cab!"

Despite her age, Josephine has legs like a stag. Anatole France has stopped, out of breath. We were already at the gate amid a crowd of idlers

when the imperious maid-servant seized the Immortal by the tails of his coat. She drags him back like a goat to the Villa Said calling the passers-by to witness.

"Wanted to slip off, did he, without changing his shirt? And it's I who get the blame from Madame. 'Josephine,' says she, 'I count on you to look after Monsieur France. You know he is a child.' She sent her valet this morning. They've got a great luncheon party with ministers and actresses and countesses. You must put on your morning coat. The idea of it, to be off like that to lunch with swells in a flannel shirt!"

Anatole France says nothing, but lifts his eyes to heaven. He makes a gesture of some fakir refusing to fight against destiny.

We are back again in the bedroom, and start the toilet afresh. Each article of clothing serves as the pretext for fresh reproaches.

"Why have you got on these boots? You should wear your patent leather ones to-day. And these striped trousers? That waistcoat won't do at all."

The great man yields on every point, save only the night-shirt. To have done with it, Josephine passes the ceremonial article, all starched and stiff, over the nocturnal garment. He sighs.

"Ah, what a heart of triple brass the brute had who invented these tin breastplates. It is a

sarcophagus in which a man is buried alive like some miserable mummy!"

At last he is dressed. His tie is neatly tied. Josephine feels his pockets big and small, one by one.

"Have you got money? Your pocket-book? Your watch? Your keys? Your handkerchief? Ah, and your spectacles? Where are your spectacles? You know that without your spectacles you are like a soul in torment!"[1]

What she actually says is: "A donkey in torment."[2] The review over, she winds up:

"Monsieur France is the quaintest man in all Paris. The very oddest. There's not another man so distracted."

Transformation scene! Benign Monsieur Bergeret, who has suffered all these assaults and rebukes from his chambermaid, and let himself be turned about like a teetotum for a quarter of an hour, leaps in the air at the epithet.

"You hear, Brousson, she called me 'distracted.' Distracted! This brainless wench treats the French language as she treats her Master! Monstrous!"

He lifts his hands to heaven.

"Distracted! Distracted! O evil-tongued woman! Have you any idea of what distraction is? Distraction, Josephine, comes from rapidity

[1] Fr. Une âme en peine.
[2] Fr. Un âne en peine.

and lightness of wits. Alas, my wits are not light. I am not distracted, but abstracted. Abstracted!" he repeats at every step as we go downstairs.

I am treated all the length of the Avenue du Bois to a minute philological disquisition on abstracted and distracted.

"Every man who is abstracted is distracted, but by no means all distracted men are abstracted. The abstracted man pursues one idea—his idea: the distracted man pursues a thousand—that is to say, none. The abstracted man is absorbed by his internal life and sees nothing of the external world: the gaze of the distracted man flits over everything and distinguishes nothing—he is in a maze. The distracted man is without common sense. The abstracted man may have genius."

* * * * *

DISENCHANTMENT

He sighs.

"In all the world the unhappiest creature is man. It is said: 'Man is the lord of creation.' Man is the lord of suffering, my friend. There is no clearer proof of the non-existence of God than life."

"But you are among the envied of this world. Every one envies your genius, your health, your youth."

"Enough, enough! Ah, if you could read in my soul, you would be terrified."

He takes my hands in his, and his are trembling and feverish. He looks me in the eyes. His are full of tears. His face is haggard. He sighs: "There is not in all the universe a creature more unhappy than I. People think me happy. I have never been happy for one day, not for a single hour."

* * * * *

LESS FACTS

"Madame S—— has been here. You don't know who Madame S—— is? Oh, you should know her. She is an admirable friend, a person of excellent judgment and most agreeable. She is kind enough to call at the Villa Said once a month. Her speciality is dealing in adventures of the heart. Madame S—— in short is a female Pandarus. Ah, no profession is without merit—and so many men are! She is a jolly, plump, ugly little body who looks like a school-teacher, or rather as if she kept a boarding establishment for young ladies. And in fact she does keep an establishment, not a primary school, but one for pupils in their second childhood. I have imagined sometimes that I saw a little bit of violet ribbon on the left side of her ample bust. Really now, why should she not have the *palmes académiques?* At all events she tells me that she provides for the entertainment of several of my colleagues in Immortality, and even two or three former ministers of Education and

Public Worship. So you see the service she renders to literature and politics. You seem to me rather cool about Madame S——. You are wrong: she is a thorough woman of business. She comes. 'Good morning, Madame S——.' 'Good morning, my dear Master.'

"'How go your little affairs of the heart?'

"'So, so. And your literature?'

"'Pooh. What novelties have you, Madame S——?'

"'Look for yourself.'

"Then she hands me a sort of album, bound in morocco, that never leaves her. Between ourselves, this fat, solemn-looking, black book, very much like a missal, gives her the air of a person of great piety. We turn the leaves together.

"'What do you say to No. 2? She is a blonde. Most sweet-tempered. Her husband is a Cabinet minister. And No. 3? A lovely brunette. The real Spanish temperament. She was for a long time the mistress of an ambassador. No. 5. Ah! That's a real pearl. She has Venetian red hair. A charming actress too. A rich manufacturer is backing her. She's sure to come out soon at the Théâtre Français and then Bartet and Segond-Weber must look to their laurels. She's such a darling, and so well educated. She'ld suit you down to the ground. She knows Latin, Greek, and Italian; she has a university degree——'

"'Madame S——! Madame S——!' I an-

swered. 'Less facts! Less facts, if you please, and more figure.'"

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THE CEREMONIES

As a master of the ceremonies—his own—he distinctly follows middle-class tradition. He is very careful not to call every woman "Madame." The lady of the second-hand shop near Saint Germain-des-Près where he rummages every Saturday, he dubs bluntly "Mother S." "Little Madame T.," he keeps for the antique dealer whose shop is a few steps off on the Quai Voltaire. The Quai Voltaire, you see, is a noteworthy place: he was born there. Besides, little Madame T.'s prices, her place, her own get-up and appearance entitle her to more respect than the second-hand shopkeeper.

When it comes to the wife of the opulent owner of the bookshop on the right bank, where nothing but fine editions in red morocco with heraldic tooling are to be found, there is no hesitation: she has the right to "Madame."

He is careful to give people their right titles. He "Monsignor's" the bishops. Ministers he salutes with "Excellency." Does the buttonhole sport a little red ribbon, its owner becomes "My dear Chevalier" or "My dear Commander." He recites titles of nobility with the gusto of one of Georges Ohnet's characters. He embellishes them

with epithets. Speaking of Madame de Noailles he always says: "The divine and tuneful Countess." But he adds: "She is a republican."

Ladies of light virtue are not, in his mouth, ladies: they are "creatures." "God's creatures," "darlings," "little sweethearts," and other fantastic appellations.

He is prodigal of "celebrated" and "glorious."

"How is your celebrated father?" he asks importantly of the daughter of S., the artist, who is seven years old and is sucking her thumb.

For people about whom he knows nothing, he falls back on analogy without rhyme or reason. Every lawyer is Cicero, or at least Berryer. Doctors are Hippocrates or Galen. His own—he is frequently changed—is always "My saviour," or "the man who has dragged me back from the gates of the grave."

Any puny, stammering lecturer is compared to Mirabeau. The worst dauber is hailed as the rival of Apelles: "Good morning, my dear Rubens—Brousson, let me introduce you to the Ingres of our time, the incarnate art of the brush."

Rhymesters, according to the moment or his fancy, are Virgils and Hugos. The quaint thing is that they all accept these massive compliments without flinching.

Anatole France is prone to the embrace. Some one rings at the door. "Don't let him in!" he shrieks to Josephine from the landing. "The

man's a deadly bore." But should the intruder succeed in forcing an entrance, he throws himself on his neck:

"Ah, how happy I am to see you! I was longing for a sight of you. Indeed this is a happy day for me! It makes me young again to see you."

And he embraces him in the antique fashion, majestically, as people do in tragedies. His embrace is in the grand style. Only in Molière do you find such greetings. First he clasps the astonished visitor in great frenzied arms. Then, overflowing with emotion, he presses him to his heart. Right and left, his silvered beard brushes the cheeks. He closes his eyes as if to restrain his tears from gushing forth. He makes sweet tender sounds, trembling, so that you almost expect him to faint away. He renews the embrace, scarce able to emerge from so passionate a grasp. Finally he abandons the intruder to greet the next comer.

Encouraged by such warmth, the bore thinks the moment has come to ask the favour he has come for. He takes a precious *Thais* from the pocket of his overcoat, a first edition in large format. After so much embracing he begs for the added grace of an inscription from the Master on the fly-leaf. Anatole France's face is suddenly downcast. He looks at me with anguish so much as to say: "What is the idiot's name?" He excuses himself: "There's no pen or ink. It's Josephine's fault!" But the much embraced gen-

tleman sticks to it: "Oh, please! Here is my stylograph."

Then France: "My dear friend, be so charming as to dictate to me the exact way you spell your name."

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WHITE SALES

When the author of *Thais* wants to deal a mortal wound, it is not in the face that he strikes, nor at the heart: he caps his opponent with the supreme insult "impotent."

The novelist B——, for instance, is his pet aversion, and he abounds with nasty remarks about him.

"He is always speaking of women. Why, he doesn't know what they are! His famous psychology is that of a eunuch fingering underlinen in a shop during a white sale. His adulteries invariably remind me of the models and catalogues at the Louvre.[1] There is everything there:—embroidered sheets like altar cloths, and lace, and bows —everything—except the passion, the warmth, the spasm."

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THE PERIOD

Scene at an antique dealer's. A work of art is offered to him. He sniffs it over, then hands it back with disgust.

[1] The *Grands Magazins du Louvre:* the shop, not the museum. —J. P.

"It is not of the good period," he declares.

I ask: "What is the good period?"

He reflects a little, then answers:

"The good period, my young friend, is every period, except our own. In literature the good period ends with Nodier. In painting with Ingres. As to furniture, nothing decent has been made since the Consulate."

"Then you condemn our epoch at one fell swoop?"

"At one swoop: yes. The Republic is the reign of ugliness. Look at its schools, its barracks, its prefectures, its statues. In ugliness, Marianne [1] is infallible."

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THE LOVER OF RELICS

I find him perched on a step-ladder in the hall.

"You look struck all of a heap to see me hammer in hand. Yes, I'm driving in nails. Oh, I'm not good at it: I give my fingers horrid knocks. But it is the manual labour that St. Benedict alternates with the spiritual in the rules for his monks. The alternation is excellent after a little spree. It doesn't often happen to me. But yesterday it did. Oh, my sprees would be virtue itself to many a man! After a little escapade nothing is so refreshing as some material occupation: changing the pictures for instance from left to right. That's

[1] Marianne = modern France, as John Bull = England.—J. P.

what I'm doing this morning. Will you help me? What an upside down arrangement to be sure! I don't take you out on my sprees, but I do make you join in my penance. Give me an idea. Where we can put this reliquary?"

He points to a frame from a convent parlour lying on the ground. Round an artlessly illuminated devotional picture are arranged bones of saints on cotton-wool, festooned with paper like frills on cutlets *à la Soubise*.

"How do you like my relics? You know there's every sort of thing here, but the very best only. Read the inscriptions: St. Francois de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Chantal. All French saints, too! Between ourselves they are the best. Really, with all these bones, I ought to win salvation! For, you know, the remains of the blessed, down to the least stump or splinter, are impregnated with saintliness until the Resurrection. You have no faith in my relics? Wretched youth! Ah, I see that the spirit of the age has seduced you from the noble promise of your pious childhood. Hand me the picture with respect. It works just the same, you know, on unbelievers, by exosmosis or endosmosis. That indeed is what I count upon. I got this splendid reliquary at a very reasonable price from a sordid Jewess on the left bank. How she stinks, that female de-

scendant of Solomon! Her breath is pure litharge. And doesn't she drink! In the morning it's to keep the damp out. It must be a stubborn variety of damp, for she keeps it out all day long. But back it comes again. When it's hot, she must refresh. When it's freezing, she must warm up. I like such an unchangeable disposition. Yet the fumes of wine never make her lose that sense of business which is the birthright of the children of Israel. Sometimes I have thought, thanks to Bacchus, to drive a good bargain. Yesterday I found her in her back shop in an ecstatic condition stuck in a slop-pail as tight as an egg in its cup. I helped her out of her fix. Hardly was she on her feet but she butted into this picture with the relics. My head swam. I have never lost a keen Catholic sensibility. I dislike seeing angels and saints and bones of martyrs and virgins in the hands of the merchants of the Temple. That's why I am so keen to collect devotional objects that have sunk to the level of bric-à-brac. My house will soon be a sacristy. I said to the old witch:

"'How much for this picture?'

"That woman is incredible. The drunker she is, the more cunning she gets. She can't refuse to sell, for that would be a confession of her state. But she realizes that she is fighting against odds. Her business weapons are drowned in wine. So

she devotes all her energy to making unintelligible, but by no means unintelligent, answers.

"'How much for the reliquary?'

"'——ty francs.'

"'Forty francs?'

"'No, no! ——ty francs?'

"'A hundred and forty francs?'

"'No, I tell you! ——ty francs.'

"There was nothing to be got out of her but that enigmatic '——ty francs.' Only the return of her reason could make the figure clear. Thus piously, though no dupe, I carried off the saints' precious bones, for fear lest the good lady should profane them with her hiccups. Here is her address. Now, my dear fellow, do be so good as to go there some time to-day. Say to her with your most ingenuous air: 'I have come about the reliquary that Monsieur France bought from you. Forty francs, isn't it?'

"She will protest. She will say that I want to ruin her; that it cost her twenty times as much; that it was not the price we agreed on. She will want to prove it to you by her books. She will try to make you read her scrawls yourself. Don't discuss with the harpy, or you're lost. Stick to forty francs. Saints' bones are going for nothing this year. Not a copper more! If she won't agree to the price—a very fair one, too—then she must take the picture back. But she won't: there's no

one now but me to buy relics and perfume his house with them."

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FIRST LOVE

"My first love? Ah! I must go back to the Flood, then.

"I was eight or nine years old. In our house on the Quai Voltaire, one story above our little entresol, lived a lady who was 'kept.' What meaning people used to put into that word!

"In those days of innocence, I did not know properly what it meant. Still, I felt that this lady of the 'half-world' far surpassed our world in wealth and elegance. There was a good deal of envy and admiration in the contempt shown for her. How elegant she was! She changed her dress every day, and several times a day. It was like a rainbow. She would go out in pink, and come back in blue. She never went out except in a carriage! On her ambassador's day—the Austrian ambassador, it was, people whispered—a brougham with an impeccable coachman used to wait at the door. Swarms of page-boys might be met on the stairs, with appetizing and perfumed offerings for her; 'buttons' buried in flowers; errand boys beribboned with dainties; dressmakers' girls blocking the way with their huge band-boxes. All this, of course, could not pass without comment, and from the ground-floor to the garret this charm-

ing person has 'a good press.' She was pleasant and open-handed, and 'She's a good soul,' people said, and 'She's so fond of her mother.' Many tales were told to illustrate her filial affection. When she met me on the landing, the lady used to stroke my cheek with her scented hand. She thought me sweet—at least, she said so. She was fond of children. Like so many of God's creatures she would no doubt have made an excellent mother of a family. But Grace was lacking to her! Grace and fortune are one and the same thing, for God loves the rich.

"One day, as I was sliding down the bannisters, the charmer gave me some *marrons glacés*. Another time, chocolates—and the ice was broken. I thought her marvellously beautiful and used to keep a look-out on the staircase and invent dodges to meet her. One morning, in spite of my mother's having forbidden me, I slipped into her flat. She was in her peignoir, and took me to her heart and her wardrobe. She showed me through her rooms. What a contrast their lightness and gaiety made with our poor, dark entresol stacked with gloomy books! The air here seemed enchanted. She showed me her jewels, took me on her knee, made my mouth all messy with jam and wiped it with her kisses. Children's eyes are like magnifying glasses, and mine devoured this regal beauty. Her skin, made up and powdered, was pure fascination, and in the scarlet of her gums, stimulated

by tooth wash, her teeth gleamed like pearls. Her fine sky-blue eyes shone from a ring of Oriental black. Her hair seemed to throw a fringe of living gold on her snow-like forehead. But it was most of all the rise and fall of her breast that put me into a torment of delight. It was the first woman's breast that these eyes, which have seen so many since, gazed upon. The fashion of the day was highly décolletée and she was in the fashion. Suddenly she must have noticed my excitability, for without more ado she flung me back and dumped me down on the floor like a dirty little animal. With a harsh gesture of disgust she pushed me towards the door and into the dark of the staircase.

"'Go home to your mother,' she called over the bannister. 'Well brought-up children ought not to come hanging about their neighbours like that.'

"I was mortified beyond description. Gone were the caresses, gone the kisses, gone the sweets! When I greeted her, she no longer responded. But her severity only increased my love. I felt I could not put up with it. One night, when I was in bed, the idea came to me to write a letter sticking up for myself to the fair neighbour. Next day I tore a page out of my copy-book but, bite my pen as I would, I didn't know how to begin. I had so much to say! After dreaming and dreaming, I fixed upon this exordium: 'Madame Ernestine! Madame Ernestine! Madame Ernestine! Take

pity on little Anatole, your neighbour below.' That was the beginning I stuck to. Oh, you laugh at the poor cherub, with his mouth half jam and half ink. I confess my first love-letter was not remarkably original, but it was a love-letter all the same. It overflowed with exclamation marks and supplications! Well, what better have men found in the five thousand years that they write to women, always to ask them the same thing? Suppress the exclamation marks and what remains, pray, of the most exquisite love-letters?

"My adventure is not so singular as it seems to you. Many men have confided similar experiences to me. Sexual precocity is quite the thing among men of letters. Think of Stendhal in love with his mother and jealous of his father. And remember Charles Nodier's first idyll: he was ten—I had the best of him there—when he took his father's finest pen and paper and wrote a letter of burning passion to a beautiful young woman, a friend of his parents, whom he idolized in secret. He told her of the ravages she had made in his heart. Like all shy souls he went straight to the point and quite simply asked for a rendezvous. The reply came at once—brief, cold, but definite. The rendezvous was accorded. Wonder! She would be, the very same evening, at the time stated, in one of the darkest avenues in the park. After a feverish day passed under an avalanche of poenas, the little fellow makes for his

garden of Eden. In the shadows he dimly descries an ethereal form. He had read in novels that in such a case the right thing to do was to fall on his knees. Behold him then at the feet of that form, and enveloped in cloudy lace. Two charming but powerful hands lift him quickly, seize him, truss him up and, in the passionate night, inflict on him a most mortifying maternal correction. 'From that evening,' confessed Charles Nodier, 'I have lost my nerve. I am sixty now; yet I never approach a woman without fear of being smacked.'

"Our fair neighbour disdained my supplications. She gave me no rendezvous. She inflicted no correction on me. When I read the *Confessions* of Jean Jacques, I was conscious of humiliation. I envied the fate of that wretched stick of a Genevese who was whacked by the charming Lambercier."

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SPELLING MISTAKES

Of all bodily defects, the most unpardonable in his eyes is physical impotence. Towards sexual aberrations he has indulgence enough and calls them pleasantly "spelling mistakes."

"There are men who write in the masculine what should be in the feminine. There are women who write in the feminine what properly should be masculine. In this sad world every one pursues his salvation as best he can! For myself, I say like Athalie to that impertinent Joash:

"'I have my God whom I serve; you shall serve yours. They are two powerful gods.'"

For Anatole France, these heresies, in short, confirm the true faith. *Oportet hereses esse.* The chaste alone find no mercy in him.

"There are no chaste people. There are hypocrites. There are sick folk. There are eccentrics. There are madmen. Say nowadays that a woman is chaste and every one will laugh at you: you simply make her ridiculous. The chaste Lucretia! The chaste Suzanne! Diana the chaste! One of the fathers of the church speaks somewhere of the 'laborious' chastity of widows. They have, you see, to struggle against the memory of pleasures they have tasted. But who prevents the widow from returning to them? Because her husband is dead, is her heart dead too? He doesn't eat any more, so she mustn't eat either! It's like the widows of Malabar! The fact is that without sensuality there is no sensibility: no soul. The more passionate we are, the more intelligent we become. The heyday of a man's life is the time of desire and of pleasure, and the wise man does all he can to prolong it. People laugh at an old man in love! Could anything be crueller or more stupid? For myself, I parody the formula of Descartes, and say: 'I love, therefore I am. I love no more, therefore I no longer exist.'"

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LABORIOUS FELICITY

"I am like Renan," he explains to me. "The author of the *Vie de Jésus* scribbled whatever it might be and sent it to the printer's. The proofs came back. He corrected them—once, twice, thrice. At the fifth time, it began to be like Renan. In my case it is the sixth and often the seventh time. I insist on as many as eight proofs. What can I do? I have no imagination, but I am not without patience. My most valuable working tools are the pastepot and the scissors.

"You look surprised, my young friend. Yes, I am stripping myself bare before you. No doubt you imagined that an angel whispered whole pages and chapters to me at a single breath. I have rarely felt the gust of inspiration. My pen has no lyric powers. It does not leap, but goes plodding along its way. Nor have I ever felt the intoxication of work. I write with difficulty. When some one says to me, 'Give us a hundred or a hundred and fifty lines,' I inquire definitely, 'Do you want a hundred, or do you want a hundred and fifty? It is not at all the same thing.' I am like a child given a poena to do."

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THE SIX PROOFS

First of all he writes no matter what, on no matter what odds and ends of paper, in his tall, aggressive, puckered-up hand. The scrap and the scrawl go straight off to the printer.

The slip comes back from the press. Have you ever watched drawings in a studio being corrected? With a touch here and a touch there the Master gives form to the student's sketch until, suddenly, the poor botch springs into blazing life. So it is with Anatole France. On the first proof, he accentuates.

Example of accentuation. He has copied this phrase direct, without changing a word, from a biographical dictionary: "The lady Théroulde was rich and of good fame."

He reads over the phrase that he has borrowed from some commonplace historian and turns it into ridicule:

"It's as flat and insipid as a pancake."

But you will see: we shall trim the good lady to the taste of the day. And he writes:

"Since the lady Théroulde was rich, men said she was of good fame."

He is delighted with the arabesque he has made. I point out to him that he is defaming the poor woman. "Good fame is worth more than cloth of gold. Can we be sure that it was only for her money that men spoke well of Théroulde?" He shrugs his shoulders.

"I would take my oath on it. Money has great virtue, my friend. In all ages, the Middle Ages as well as our age, it is the supreme virtue. Besides which, you are needlessly energetic in Madame

Théroulde's defence. To-day she is but dust, while my words are throbbing with life."

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THE BASTARD STOP

Fresh proofs, fresh corrections. This time is the turn for "weeding," to use his picturesque expression. The dog-grass that has sprung up must be torn out: the "which's," "who's," and "whose's," and "whereof's."

"They give the best style a crick in the neck," he says. "Banish too the semicolon, that bastard stop that is neither full stop nor comma. It was perfect for the days of complimentary speeches, long discourses, and funeral orations. It gave repose to the flowing period. But we live in the day of the pneumatic and the telephone. Whenever you can shorten a sentence, do. And one always can. The best sentence? The shortest.

"Beware of finely spacious and melodious phrases. First they gently rock you, then send you to sleep. As for transitions, don't give a fig for them. The best way of concealing from the reader your passage from one thing to another is to take it in a quick jump, without boggling."

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THE SCISSORS

Fourth journey to the printer's. The slips are sent back.

"Verbal repetitions? In a writer worthy of

the name—remember this—there are no such things. Doubtless, after the first rush, you will find in my paragraphs a word that comes over and over again. That is the leit-motiv of the symphony. Be careful not to delete and replace it by a synonym. Real synonyms do not exist. Why should I stultify myself? When I used the word that you shy at, I had imperative reasons for it. If it seems tedious when it turns up again, that is only because it is badly placed. Respect the word. Cut up the sentence. Bring the scissors into play. The scissors! Ah, who could rightly celebrate their usefulness to literature? The perfect writer is always represented with a goose-quill between his fingers. That is his weapon, his heraldic arms. Now I should like to be painted wielding my scissors, like a dressmaker."

So saying, Anatole France takes a bundle of proofs, the first chapter of his *Joan of Arc*. With the aid of huge, archaic scissors he cuts up each sentence. The scissors clip round single words. He looks like a needlewoman cutting out an embroidered festoon.

"Oh, Master! You are turning the Maid into a maze!"

"Patience! She will come to life again. This exercise is salutary, even for the soul. It is a great lesson of humility. In the fire of composition—though my fire burns so low it will hardly keep

the pot boiling—in the fire of composition, I say, you give way to Pindaric spasms. Your tongue lingers over your paragraph like a sweet. You gargle with your sentences. You end by bewitching yourself. Your enthusiasm for your own copy dazzles you. You cease to distinguish the true from the false and simplicity from bombast. But the scissors work in the cold light of the dissecting-room. They cut out all that is adventitious and preserve only the healthy flesh. The operation is cruel, but indispensable.

"Another defect. Each man writes according to his own rhythm, and also according to the usual format of his paper. By a glance or mere sniff at any author you put before me I will tell you, from simply looking at the black and white, whether he has good lungs or is asthmatic, whether he is crabbed or kind, and whether he uses foolscap, demy, or small post paper. Whatever we do, physique plays tricks with the mind. We are slaves to our format. From school onwards we have acquired the habit of filling our page. The result is a series of stanzas—an essay in bravura. The scissors! The scissors, I say! Let us have done with this arbitrary and mechanical order of things."

The father of *Thais* takes each sentence, one by one, as if he were playing a game of patience, mates it with another taken at random, divorces

it again, and looks for a different union. Thirty times he rebuilds his paragraph. At last he cries: "Victory! The last sentences are now the first."

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EPITHETS ALL CONTRARY

Fifth proof. Verification of epithets.

"There are some who make the verb the mainspring of their sentence. For myself, I take the simplest and most childish verb, so long as it best renders the movement. But I nurse my adjectives. I share the opinion of Voltaire. Remember that wise, humorous saying of his: 'Although the adjective agrees with the substantive in gender, number and case, none the less the adjective and the substantive do not always agree.' Why multiply them to say the same things? If you must scatter them about, make them contrary. That is how you will catch the reader. Don't write: 'Magnificent and pious prelates went in procession to seek the Holy Phial,' but: 'Obese and pious prelates went in procession.'

"Neither should you despise the negative epithet. Its effect is unexpected, and therefore irresistible. You want to describe the dismal solitude of a public garden on a winter evening. You say: 'Gontran passed through paths bare of flowers in the Observatory gardens.' That's not bad. But 'flowerless paths' is better, far better."

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ALMOND ICING

Beginning with the sixth proof the Master adds no more. He throws cargo overboard.

"My son, beware of almond icing. Almond icing is the factitious, the adventitious. It is the meringue cream that badly dissimulates the poverty of the cake. It is the hideous plaster garland that tries to transform a garret into a palace. Down with almond icing! It makes the finest pages totter. It is on the shaky almond icing sides that the first cracks show.

"In my earliest versions of *Joan of Arc,* that I wrote for the sanctimonious, I shovelled in the almond icing. I wanted to be picturesque. Have no pity on such foolery! To-day it makes me sick. For instance, I described the house where the Maid was born—or at least, is said to have been born—in an affecting pilgrim style. I have severely blue-pencilled the passage, but it is still sticky with the meringue of devotional almond icing. See with what tender care I tread the paths of the humble garden, half orchard, half vegetables. I pluck a little bunch of edifying flowers. I put an apple to my lips. Almond icing! All almond icing! Pass me the scissors. Away with the apple trees and flowers. You regret them, little wretch? While I am wandering in the Maid's flowery garden, at Nancy or at Reims there is some crabbed, obstinate, wheezy old archivist who is deep in a study

of the orchards of Lorraine and Champagne. When my History appears, he will shout from all the house-tops that I am totally ignorant of apple culture and the flora of the Meuse, that I am an absolute ass, and that there was not a single apple tree in the orchard belonging to the d'Arcs. There were pear trees, cherry trees, currant bushes, plum trees, and all the trees dear to Barrès. And he will put in the evidence of countless documents, deeds, wills, and surveys, and I shall be covered with the dust of ignominy and eternal ridicule."

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THE AWAKENING OF VESUVIUS

"You think I am exaggerating? It has happened to me once already, over the *Procurator of Judæa*. Like every one else, including Virgil and Lamartine, I described the famous bay of voluptuous Naples. I did not forget Vesuvius. I wrote: 'At the foot of the bay, Vesuvius smoked.' 'It did not smoke!' protested a score of rascally specialists in earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. 'In the time of your procurator, Vesuvius drowsed. It slept, and neither snored nor steamed. You don't know that, and Pliny the Younger, and Pliny the Elder, etc., etc.! Go back to school, little ignoramus!' I was completely humiliated. They were right. Vesuvius awoke in 54—how could I forget it?—to engulf Herculaneum and Pompeii. I had to put out Vesuvius and modify my sentence with-

out at the same time altering my paragraph. I sought for long. At last my obstinacy was recompensed. Instead of 'Vesuvius smoked,' I put 'Vesuvius laughed.' And every one was satisfied."

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CONTRASTS

"For the names of comic heroes, make the Christian name contrast with the surname. Let the one be important, and the other trivial. Call them, for instance, Onésime Dupont, Philarète Lebrun, César Biroteau, Évariste Gamelin."

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MADAM RHETORIC

"You become a good writer just as you become a good joiner: by planing down your sentences.

"To-day rhetoric is decried: in the Middle Ages it was called 'Madam Rhetoric.' I regret it: rhetoric teaches how to please, to instruct, and to touch. Ideas pass; but rhetoric is eternal.

"Ah, yes! There is the simple style, the sublime style, the balanced style. That makes our young literary sparks shriek with laughter, doesn't it? In fact, it is a truism. Does anyone choose the same ink, the same pen, and the same tone, to write to the Archbishop of Paris, to his mistress, or to Potin?"[1]

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[1] Félix Potin, the great grocer, wine-merchant, and gastronomic purveyor of Paris.—J. P.

SUBLIMITY—INFIRMITY

"Beware of bombast after the manner of Corneille. Leave the sublime to the teachers. Nothing is so easy as to astound by thundering, in time or out of it. Bad singers shout; good ones sing with feeling. One touch of affectation and you are far from nature. Yet in the end you have to return to her. Though you may be perched up on the clouds, you must still come back to earth with your reader. Think of the famous 'That he should die!' of Horace. The critics are unanimous that after such a moment no matter what verse must fall flat. Nothing could be more false. Let us reconstruct the scene.

"What would you he should do 'gainst three?

"*Horace.* That he should die!"

(Applause, cheers, flowers, bouquets, wreaths, handkerchiefs, triumph.)

"But he is your son?

"*Horace* (more and more excited). He is no longer son of mine!"

(Bravo. Bravissimo! Triumph, handkerchiefs, wreaths, cheers, applause.)

"The house rocks from stalls to gallery in an epidemic of Corneillian epilepsy. The swaying chandelier joins in the applause with its crystal festoons. It is more than a triumph: it is a revolution in drama. None the less a halt must be called on the giddy path. A return must be made

to the action and to common sense. A play which was applauded at every line and every hemistich would keep the spectators stuck all night in their stalls. When you go in for delirium, who knows where it will end? On Mount Pindus, or in the lunatic asylum? It is the same thing with the novel. More often than not a strained style indicates an absurd situation. Nothing is easier to spin than a bit of bravura. But you must sew it on to the action. It is like a purple mantle that must be botched with rags. When I began to write, I tormented myself to reach the sublime. Now I flee from it."

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AT HUYSMANS'

One evening the Abbé V—— of Saint-Sulpice took me to see Huysmans. His flat near the Bon Marché is small but light. From the windows you see convent gardens and orphan schools, where everything—paths, plane-trees, and children—are uniform. A maid, like a lay sister, comes and goes, silent and furtive in the anteroom. Along the walls are shelves of pine wood full of paper-covered volumes and old books. A man comes to greet the abbé. He is tall and has a powerful neck like that of a wrestler, but a wrestler beaten, worn-out, and shivering. Through the folds of his scarf the weary, drooping head is barely visible. His clenched hands, like an old woman's,

hold a worn puce-coloured dressing-gown wrapped round him. His slippers drag with soft hesitation along the parquet floor. He folds the abbé in his arms. We go into the next room, the dining-room, apparently. On the walls are photographs of primitives: descents from the cross, crucifixions and passions, images of dread discoloured by the sunshine. On the mantelpiece, between two vases with Jericho roses that look like thistles, is a poor Louis XVI monstrance. The rays of the eucharistic sun have lost their gilt and show the copper underneath. In the lunula, in place of the host, a poor relic is seen through the clouded glass. Above the mantelpiece, transformed into an altar, hangs a great crucifix of plaster and black wood, with a sprig of box such as one sees in convent parlours. The strangeness of the room breathes that sharp, fusty, devotional odour common to sacristies and infirmaries.

We sit down before a poor fire made of two wheezy logs.

The conversation turns first of all on the writer's health. He no longer believes in doctors. He places himself in the hands of God. Does He not know better than any what we need? He suffers, yes; but perhaps not enough. He has so much to expiate! He tells us of his devotions. He recites the rosary. At first the prayer seemed to him mechanical, but that was because he was still

poisoned by literary pride. *Manrèse* of St. Ignatius is fruitful reading. He has changed his confessor: the Abbé M—— was far too worldly and lacking in severity. The new confessor delights him. He is a true rustic, the son of peasants, who drives his flock as his father, a farmer of Beauce, drove his horses and sheep and pigs.

The abbé presents me to the writer.

"My fellow-countryman, Jean Jacques Brousson. He is the son of the excellent man who was doctor to our seminary of Nîmes and to nearly all the religious associations of Gard. Doctor Brousson is a Knight of the order of St. Gregory."

On this, the author of *En Route* seems to become conscious of my presence. He interrogates me:

"You want to go in for literature? My poor young man! First you should assure your salvation. Ah, you have gone as secretary to Anatole France? So much the worse for you! He is a great writer, but he lacks the one necessary thing: faith. Yet he was brought up piously, I have heard, by Christian parents. But vanity, the thirst for applause, the love of paradox—in short, he is in a parlous state. Not for all his fame would I be in his place."

Here a short pause. Huysmans coughs, spits into the fire, tries to reunite the hopelessly divorced logs, and goes on:

"I used to frequent Anatole France in times past. He was a charming wit if not a man of charm. It distresses me to see him slipping down that incline. In memory of our old friendship say this to him for me:

"'Illustrious Master, are you not sometimes a little weary of the adoration of men? Do you feel no giddiness on the superhuman pinnacle to which idolaters have raised you up? Have you forgotten the grace of your holy baptism and of your first communion? Dear Master, when night falls, flee from all these courtiers who hide the truth from you with their flattery. Go, as your good mother did, into some ancient church of the people, Saint-Séverin, for instance. Dip your fingers into the common vessel of holy water, like the simple women and little children of the district. Put off your poor Immortality. Make the ancestral sign of the cross and then kneel down at the end of the apse by the stone palm-tree. There, alone with God, under the shadowy light of the stained glass windows, ask if we were created and sent into the world and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ to write mere insolence?'"

Next day I faithfully related the homily to Anatole France. In a dry voice the Master said to me:

"Poor Huysmans, he is in a sad way. His bigotry is a lamentable sign of his age. When you

see him—one attention deserves another—tell him: 'France recommends you to have your water analysed.'"

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AUTHENTICITY

He is driving a bargain over one of the pictures with relics for which he has such a fancy.

"I shall end," he says, "by giving refuge to all the saints of Paradise. It will be the devil if they don't remember, in the next world, the hospitality I have given them in this. So you see I am certain of salvation. There will surely be some Virgin to hold out her hand to me, and to say to the Everlasting Father: 'I know him. He is not so black as he is painted. For years I lay in his bedchamber.'"

But he is anxious about the "authenticity."

"What's that, the authenticity?" asks the astounded curio-dealer.

"Woman without faith! The authenticity is the deed that proves the truth of relics. Without a document and without the bishop's seal the saintliest remains lack value. I mean, for a Christian, not a collector. Your picture has its seal intact, I admit; but the authenticity is lost. I don't want it. I must have my saints and martyrs and doctors and virgins with the makers' guarantee."

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THE SATYR TAMED

"What do you think of her?"

"She is imposing."

"You are not very enthusiastic. Well, my friend, even at her age she still arouses passion. The other morning in the Bois, she left her carriage and was taking a stroll in one of the little avenues, when she saw coming towards her—I should say, at her—the Satyr! You know, the Satyr whose fame is so wide-spread, the only being who upholds in Paris the ancient reputation of the fauns and forest gods. He came at her full sail, and in a state of high excitement. Now what would you have done in Madame's place? If you had belonged to the fair sex, I mean?"

"And you yourself, Master? What would you have done?"

"Oh, I hardly know. 'Lead us not into temptation,' says the Christian prayer. How perfectly absurd! If I had still the gift of prayer, I would repeat without ceasing: 'Oh, Lord, lead me into temptation.' But it's not a question of me. The Satyr was marching on Madame, armed with his desire. Madame advanced on him, armed on her side, with her lorgnette. When she was close to him:

"'Take care, my good man,' said she in a disdainful voice, 'or you will catch cold.'

"Wasn't that better than to cry: Police! Help!

Outrage! In one second Priapus sank again to be a mere bourgeois. His sails were drawn in."

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THALIA AND CLIO

"Sardou is a cunning fellow. He once gave me a good lesson. We were dining together with some common friends. During the week a book or an article had appeared upon the Naundorffs, the false Dauphins, and the substitution of a child for Louis XVII in the Temple. Sardou supported the theory of Louis XVII having been carried off, and put all his southern ardour into it. To him it was obvious that Marie Antoinette's son had not died in prison. And he described to us the circumvolutions of the plot, and the details of the substitution and the kidnapping, with such realism and vivid minuteness that one could have sworn he had been present at the romantic scene.

"What about the official report of the autopsy, drawn up by the surgeon Pelletan? I asked. In vain. Sardou grew warm. He almost had recourse to insult and personality. I was completely taken aback by his frenzy, and could not refrain from remarking to him:

"'Really, my dear Sardou, you take the case of Louis XVII so much to heart that one might almost imagine it to be a family matter. Have you by chance any claim to the throne of France,

through some cousinly relationship with the Naundorffs?'

"He was disarmed and laughed. The ordinary tone came back to his voice and he screwed up his eyes with amusement as he said in my ear:

"'Between ourselves, the kidnapping of the Dauphin would make such a splendid play! The theory of his death in the Temple is untenable. There is nothing dramatic about it.'

"Some time after, Sardou produced *Pamela, marchande de frivolités.*"

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ACADEMIC STRATEGY

"I was told so often that I must belong to it, that in the end I agreed. It was Halévy who undertook to chaperon me in the halls of the Immortals. He gave me lessons in the strategy of the Academy. I had my programme marked out every morning: I was to go here, go there, call on the Comtesse de —— ; talk of this and of that, of the Comte de Chambord, of Chateaubriand at Madame P——'s; sound the praises of Victor Hugo; and so forth. My candidature was truly painstaking, but the obstacles began to interest me in the game. It is difficult to conceive the extent to which the Forty, so insignificant in their works, are potent in real life. It's their esprit de corps. They spend all the activity of their minds in intrigue. Do you know a more finished idiot

than L——? And think of P——'s gobbling silliness! And B——, the most snuffling twaddler of modern times? Well, when it comes to making your entrance beneath the Cupola, all these boobies develop a marvellous cunning. You must undergo a sort of initiation. You must prove yourself their equal in worthlessness. Matters came finally to my letter of candidature. I made it as simple as I could. Halévy did not approve. 'You are far too presumptous,' said he. 'Try another style.' So he made a draft for me which I copied with astonishing docility. In the new version there were not more than four mistakes in French."

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THE VEIL OF THE FUTURE

"In his old age, Renan wanted to lift the veil of the future. And why, in heaven's name? To satisfy his scientific curiosity. 'With what rapture,' he confided to me, 'would he not have pored over the most elementary text-book of science that schoolboys would carry in their satchels a hundred years after his death!' And I too, I should like to lift that mysterious veil. I too, have my scientific curiosity. But it is not so chimerical as that of the old sacristan. I don't care a fig for cucurbits and alembics, for steam and electricity. I was for too long possessed by the superstition of science. To-day I have abandoned such vanities. I no more believe in that science which ar-

rogates to itself alone the title of exact. Such presumptuousness is enough to condemn it. If I might choose out of the piles of books that will be published a hundred years after my death, do you know what I should take? A novel? No, always the same rhapsody. A man loves a woman who doesn't love him; or a woman loves a man who doesn't love her; or both love each other or detest each other madly. There are a certain number of possible combinations, but even with the addition of the lover there are not more than a dozen situations. No, I should not take a novel from the library of the future; nor a history book, for if that has any interest, it is a novel too. I should simply take, my friend, a fashion paper to see how women dressed a century after my decease. Their ribbons and bibbons would tell me more about future humanity than all the philosophers, novelists, preachers, and men of science."

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A HISTORIC HOUSE

He points out a house of pleasing exterior in the Rue Chalgrin. It is of brick and stone, built in a substantial Louis XIII—Napoleon III style. He says:

"What do you think of it?"

"Hm, nothing much."

"Young wretch! It is a historic house! It is the house of the *Mannequin d'Osier.*"

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THE CHILD NEEDS WAKING UP

"I have been too lazy and spoiled my writing by it. I only discovered very late—too late—what schoolmasters call the joy of work. And then I have followed my own whims too much. Short stories, for instance, I used to write at the latest possible moment, like a condemned man setting down his last wishes. To make me sit down at my table and work, I had really to be driven by necessity—lack of money, or some definite undertaking. Then I stuck to it as if it were a poena, yes, a real schoolboy's poena. For I had no imagination, and work, at that time, came extremely hard to me. I had all sorts of doubts and reservations. I wanted to write only things of note. I tried to force a constant stream of wit. Ah, I've come down from that since. But see the result of this mixture of doubts and laziness! The thing was that I had waited too long before entering upon a real literary career. At the age when young men dream of the Academy, the Pantheon, and the Invalides, I had no ambition. My castles in Spain were on a very modest scale. Indeed my dreams were not of castles, but of humble administrative sinecures. My father used to say: 'That child needs waking up.' My mother understood me better. I felt myself far closer to her sound common sense than to her husband's dogmatic, declamatory, emphatic turn of mind. He used to imitate his

favourite author, the Vicomte de Chateaubriand, in speaking of the tiniest domestic incidents like a prophet of Israel. My mother would prick his heavy bubbles with unexpected darts of wit really worthy of Voltaire. She was full of charming rustic sayings."

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FAME AND THE SLIPPERS

"There used to come into our shop all sorts of old Immortal animals after the sittings of the Academies hard by. While they grubbed among the books they continued their discussions. They inspired me with deep admiration. For me fame was spelt by the names of MM. X—— and Y—— of the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* or of the *Sciences Morales et Politiques*. How marvellous it would be to write a learned history or commentary! To be one of those courteous, well-brushed old men, with red or violet or biscuit-coloured ribbons in their button-holes, like hortensias! To live with a hobby apart from one's own century, in another age, to know hardly anything about one's contemporaries, but to be intimate and familiar with Cicero, Corneille or Madame de Sévigné! That was what fame seemed to me."

"And to-day, Master?"

"To-day, my son, fame lies in being able to do what I like. I receive ministers and publishers in my dressing-gown and my slippers. I give

audience, and often I refuse it, to them. It's my turn to make them wait, as they often did me. In a word, the Académie Française and the renown of being a great writer—this great crown, so to speak—permits me to wear, in season and out of season and wherever I choose, my old grey felt hat. If I wanted, I could go to the Opera in list slippers. These are the smaller advantages, but there are large ones too. Between ourselves a member of the Academy to which all the old maids leave their savings to found good conduct prizes—the Prix Montyon, for instance—why now, the Academy is above the law, and can snap its fingers at statutes and magistrates. Shall I give you an example?"

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RUSTIC PLEASURES

"Not long since I was taking my pleasure in sylvan fashion with a tender soul, as it were a nymph, met in a grove in the Bois de Boulogne. I am rather short-sighted and have no skill in concealing my feelings. Besides I lack caution and am, alas! wholly without that greatest of social virtues, hypocrisy. Seated on a bench, my companion and I were enjoying ourselves in all innocence. Suddenly a proud keeper appeared and in a tone of fury said:

"'I've been watching you for the last quarter of an hour, you old satyr. What's your name?'

"By good luck I had a visiting card on me? I handed it to him with a five-franc piece. He pocketed the one and looked at the other. When he saw that I was a member of the Académie Française, the brute overflowed with courtesy:

"'Pray forgive me, sir,' he said. 'I couldn't know: all sorts of people come here. Besides, if I ventured to interpose, it is on account of the children. The little rascals have eyes, you know, when it comes to seeing what they ought not to see. Apart from that, I don't give a rap. What are woods made for, if not for love-making? The unfortunate thing is that your good lady has a red petticoat that can be seen from as far off as if it were a flag. If the lady will excuse the suggestion, black would be much better. Less obvious. Discretion is always advisable, isn't it, sir? In that case I should not have come up, but I should then not have had the honour of making the acquaintance of a member of the Academy, sir.'"

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THE REDEMPTION OF BOOKS

He has fished up a slender catch of small books of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from the bookseller's box on the Embankment. The haul, as I point out to him, is worthless.

"My friend, I cannot go to sleep of an evening without an old book, be it good or bad. It is a sort of rite. And then, there are no bad books, any

more than there are ugly women. I admit indeed that contemporary books do not interest me. By pondering over this, I have discovered the reason for it: they are not real books. There was a time when, I confess, my taste was ostentatious. My vanity got the better of my appetite. How many books have I not bought for the binding, the frontispiece, or a flower! To-day I make provision against insomnia. Should nightmare come, I take refuge in the past.

"To be quite candid, there is a certain amount of charity in my purchases. Even so did the brothers of the Redemption act when they bought back Christians from the irons of the Mamamouchis. I redeem for the modest price of fifty centimes or a franc good men who have sunk to the ignominy of the book-boxes. If we may believe the pious, he who will reward for a glass of water will leave nothing without reward. He keeps exact account of our good, as of our evil actions Some day, I trust, a writer—a just man he must be and disdainful of his time—will hold out to me a helping hand when I lie in one of these coffins of pine and metal, under the rain and the wind and the unkind words of passers-by along with the flower of theologians and the authors of the *Génie du Christianisme, Lettres sur la Mythologie,* and such like. These little books seem to you worthless: you are in the contemptuous age, my son! Try to be more charitable. Follow my example

and that of the kind St. Francis of Assisi. If he found on his path—now where did I read that? No matter—if he found a scrap of writing on his path, he picked it up with care, lest his feet should tread on the name of Jesus and of Mary, or on some passages treating of divine things. One day, one of his disciples—he must have been, like you, young, charming, and contemptuous—asked him:

"'Blessed Father, why do you so carefully gather all these writings even when they are from the pagans?'

"'My son, it is because I find in them the letters that form the name of God and of his divine mother.'"

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THE NEVERS DISH

The engraver P—— is the friend of his youth. They were, I think, bosom friends at school. They loved the same woman, and it was P—— who won her. Life has not separated them. "P——," says France, "is my most intimate friend, and my dearest."

It is also of P— that he thinks most frequently.

"P—— has talent, distinct talent. Is it really talent, though? Method rather, perhaps.

"He made a very skilful engraving of a work by Daumier: it was a simple transfer! Anyone could have done the same who had patience enough. And then P—— has no talent for becoming rich,

and that is the supreme talent. In his old age he is reduced to soliciting official commissions. He has made me make many humiliating applications for him. Like many others he could have put something aside for a rainy season. But he wanted to play the artist. He had a studio at Vaugirard. He was ostentatious; generous too. The imbecile married his model. She was so beautiful, his wife! Perhaps she is still. It's a good thirty years since I have seen her. P—— has the mania for being a Mæcenas. Every Sunday he would ask you to dinner with a lot of daubers and scribblers. The food was plain and good: oysters, a capon, a cake, and a very pleasing light Bordeaux. The lady of the house was charming. Lunch went on to nightfall. Supper followed, with a flaming bowl of punch. Result: he is out at elbows to-day.

"I must ask him if he still has that fine Nevers dish that hung over the mantelpiece like a shield of honour. He must have sold it. But what right had he to? For you see, the dish was not his. One Sunday we were at table as usual. Enter the girl from the oysterman's and lays the oysters, according to classic custom, on the table. 'We will bring you back the dish afterwards,' says Mme. P——, paying her.

"'Very good, madame.' The girl vanishes. We attack the oysters. By degrees, as the shells disappear, the bottom of the dish appears and on

it, in camaïeu,[1] a biblical scene: the judgment of Solomon. We bend over it. We discuss. We argue. 'It's a Rouen. No! It's a Nevers, a fine Nevers, of the beginning of the seventeenth century, and it's perfect. Not a single crack in it! It's worth at least five hundred francs. Shall we send it back?'

"'Why should we send it back?' puts in P——. 'See what these people do with works of art. It would be simply throwing pearls before swine. If we take it back to them, they will go on using it like this until it is broken or is mislaid by some customer who has a weakness for oysters and Nevers pottery. Providence has sent it here. Where could it be better than at an artist's?' Some of the guests, however, jealous of the transaction, questioned whether it was quite the thing.

"'Of course it's a shame to send back a masterpiece like this to the hands of those vandals. But it belongs to them. You ought to make them an offer for it.'

"'Make them an offer? You don't know these people. If I exchange their Nevers dish for a dish from the bazaar near by, they won't even notice the difference. They are brute beasts. But if I say to them: What do you want for this dish? It has a certain value—I shall be giving them the office. Their imagination will be fired and they'll ask something preposterous.'

[1] See the *Oxford English Dictionary*.—J. P.

"Finally after the pros and the cons had been argued, it was decided to keep the Nevers dish, as immeasurably too good for such cads, and to substitute another. A royal tip was to be given.

"'Hi! Not too royal!' cried P——. 'The fellows will smell a rat.'

"Every Sunday, as he swallowed the classic oysters, P—— congratulated himself on his happy acquisition. He and his Nevers dish got on my nerves. 'P——,' I said to him one day, 'you are a thief.' And as he was religious, I added: 'Your dish will drag you down to hell, my dear chap. Restore or be damned!' But he only shrugged his shoulders. He told me I knew nothing about either religion or morality, and that he was certain of his eternal salvation. That on the contrary God would look with favour on his having given asylum to so beautiful a thing. Perhaps he would sell his dish. Try to find out, will you, if he has still got it?"

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CHATEAUBRIAND'S STICK

"My father, as I told you, adored Chateaubriand. To him, he was the greatest genius of France ancient and modern. He knew the viscount's finest pages by heart, and used to recite them to me, deplorably badly. He turned to the viscount as to an oracle. Whatever might happen, Chateaubriand had something to say about it. Why had we not listened to him, when he spoke! For

Chateaubriand had prophesied everything! Only like poor Cassandra, the viscount had preached in the desert, and that's why we were where we were, on the brink of anarchy and demagogy. My father gave the hospitality of his bedroom pell-mell to any or all of Chateaubriand's books. He positively revelled in them. At his death I found a whole garret of stray volumes of *Itinéraires de Paris à Jérusalem, Atala, Natchez*—but not one single complete set. Besides them he left me several prized relics of his idol. He was specially proud of one of those pictures made up out of hair and displaying tombs and thoughts and hearts. He had it from the viscount's hairdresser, who religiously preserved the snippings. As far as I could see Chateaubriand had pretty coarse locks, muddy in colour and verging on red. But perhaps he dyed his hair! I gave this treasure to a lady who adored the viscount. She was beside herself with joy! And I, I profited by her enthusiasm. Another relic of the *Géni du Christianisme*: we had in the house—though where it came from I have no notion—the stick with which Chateaubriand climbed Mount Sinai. It was a cane with an ivory knob. We were ever so proud of it. It was only shown to persons of distinction, enthusiastic souls who were capable of feeling the thrill of the genius transmitted by its touch. Ah, my friend, imagine the outburst the day my father caught our servant-girl beating the bedroom rug

with the Mount Sinai stick! As a rule he never lost his temper, but now he flew into a rage bordering on apoplexy. 'Sack her!' he cried to my mother. 'Sack her, the jade! Chateaubriand's stick to beat the bedroom rug!' And he wiped the cane with his handkerchief. After that he locked it up at the bottom of a bookcase. His anger cooled and we kept the maid, who was flabbergasted by the row. She had no very clear idea as to what Chateaubriand was. She was forgiven on account of her rustic upbringing.

"By dint of reading the viscount, my excellent father contracted the disease of over-emphasis. He was a plain man, dealing with little things and small people, but he employed the most pompous terms. He loved cadences and flowing periods. Everything became a subject for his eloquence: the least domestic mishap, an egg boiled too long, or a burnt cutlet. Under the lamp that swung over our little narrow, middle-class table, he would fulminate like the viscount descending from Mount Sinai with the Tables of the Law in the tails of his frock-coat. The veal widowed of its carrots, the sausage, and the cream cheese, became texts for his perorations. My mother was quite accustomed to it. She took no more notice of these anthems than of the murmur of the river hard by. As for me, it gave me a disgust for the viscount."

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"THE BANQUET OF THAIS"

We are on the way to dine at Lapérouse. We have left the carriage at the Place de la Concorde and, as it is warm, wander along the Embankment as far as the Pont des Arts. A crimson dusk hangs over sky and stream, ennobling everything, even the tramp we see down there by the river washing his shirt, which is changed into an emperor's toga. Anatole France lingers over the boxes of the bookstalls, still open. He sniffs the dust of the old volumes with delight. Suddenly he gives a cry of distress:

"Madame! Madame!"

Madame, who is going along, leaning on the crook of her parasol, like a shepherdess, stops in astonishment.

"What's the matter? You will raise the town, shouting like that! What have you found to make such a noise about?"

"Guess."

"I am not a witch."

"Do you give it up?"

"Yes, yes. Come along. You prevent me from enjoying the sunset."

"This book, Madame! Look in this box. The one-franc box! Lying there, in the middle of old cookery books and treatises on onanism, my radiant *Thais!*"

"Ah! It's a first edition. That's a good

stroke of business for you. You will be able to resell it at a profit."

"A first edition? You may well say so. That's how one throws one's pearls to swine. There was an autograph inscription here that has been scratched out. That's a good lesson to me. No more autographs! The brute didn't go far, you see. He only cut the pages up to the Banquet. When he got into the hall, his appetite failed him."

"He didn't like your cooking. Console yourself; your banquet was laid for dainty tastes, real epicures——"

"Between ourselves, this banquet was—not Anatole France, but Brochard!"

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THE MOMENT OF DUSK

We walk on in silence to the Pont des Arts.

"Here," announces France, "we must halt for the ritual. Go, young wretch! Follow Madame on to the middle of the footbridge, and assume an air suited to the occasion. This is the moment of dusk, and this the place. You see, Madame is already in an ecstasy. She is no longer a Parisienne who lives a stone's throw from the Arc de Triomphe. She is Deborah! She is the prophetess who judged the people, seated under a palm-tree on Mount Ephraim, between Rama and Bethel. It is fifteen years since I first caught her with that inspired look on her face, towards six o'clock in the evening, on the Pont des Arts."

"This is the loveliest view in the world. I pity those who cannot perceive it."

"Bare your head, child, make contrite your heart, and admire the loveliest view in the world. Tell me, which way ought he to look? Towards the Trocadéro, with its Tartar towers, or towards the statue of the Constant Lover?[1] You don't look to me sufficiently moved, my son. Come! A little effort of memory. If you lack feeling on the Pont des Arts at six o'clock in the evening, you will never have the key to Madame's heart. She will set you down with the Thracians and the Scythians. For her the world is divided into two categories: those who admire and understand the dusk on the Pont des Arts, and barbarians."

Leaning on her parasol, beribboned with blue, Madame looks admiration incarnate. The sarcasm trickles off her, like a spring shower from a swan's feathers. With her right hand she makes little gestures, as of benediction, towards the bronze statue. Behind, Anatole France mimics her.

"What a pity," he says, "that Madame is not Queen of France! Oh, might the gods give heed! How well all would be! If Madame were Queen of France, she would put up a tablet and station a policeman here. On the tablet would be: *Sta viator!* 'Passer-by, stop! This is the loveliest view in the world, by dusk. Bare your head! Ad-

[1] *Le Vert Galant, i.e.* Henri IV of France. For this use of the word "constant," see *The Constant Lover* of St. John Hankin.—J. P.

mire and be silent!' And if you did not, the policeman would show you the frog-march.

"Madame is a connoisseur of the dusk. She has seen the sunset on the Acropolis, on the Forum, on the Escurial, on Golgotha, on the Pyramids! And on several other historical trifles, I forget what. Well, Madame has told me a hundred times, if she has told me once: 'The sunset is noble nowhere but in Paris. And to see it properly you must go to the Pont des Arts.' That is why, my child, we are on the Pont des Arts this evening. We shall come back to-morrow, and the day after to-morrow. We shall never tire of this unique spectacle, of which the dolts who cross the bridge have not even an inkling."

Madame, leaning on her beribboned parasol, has looked her fill towards the Constant Lover. Now she has turned towards the Trocadéro with its barbaric towers. She seems to give no heed to the taunts of M. Bergeret. Her sugary little voice pronounces these words:

"I love this spot. From here I can see the Louvre, the Tuileries, and the Institute—and the little house where the greatest writer of France was born."

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FRIENDSHIP AND HABIT

At luncheon he takes the defence of X—— with more force than warmth.

"He is my friend," he declares.

Madame. "Friends? You have friends? Not one. You have habits. To penetrate into the inner circle of your life, perseverance and leisure is all that is necessary. No matter who, sufficiently careful and punctual to call on you every morning at the same time, will penetrate into your heart and establish himself there. The first few days you will think him a nuisance and a bore. But by dint of thinking him stupid you will end by being interested in him. You will tell me endless stories about him. You will laugh at him, and that is your highest form of friendship. At the end of a month he will be indispensable to you. When he is not there, you will be in a vile temper. But if he goes on strike for a week, oh then, bye-bye—all hope lost! When he comes back you won't know him. You will even have forgotten his name. His place will be taken by someone else, equally indifferent to you, but more punctual. Friendship with you is punctuality."

"Why not say, a fad?"

"That's the word. A fad, absolutely."

"You are the most clear-sighted of my friends, and the most charming."

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THE HONOUR OF A NOBLEMAN

In his stories about the Academy, he generally allots the part of the butt to the Vicomte Henri de Bornier, his pet aversion. He calls him "the

father of *the Daughter of Roland.*" Poor rickety, declamatory daughter! The playwright had promised his vote to Anatole France. And, naturally, he took care to vote for his rival. Despite the treachery, France was elected.

"Shortly after my election," he relates, "Madame and I were at the Arsenal library. As you know, many ancient valuable and remarkable manuscripts are there. I ask for a book of hours to show the miniatures to Madame. My name on the slip sets the library attendants agog. They rush to the librarian. Bornier comes out. He is all smiles: 'I must ask a thousand pardons of you, my dear colleague. I promised to vote for you. But man proposes and God disposes. At the last moment, on account of my party——'

"I cut him short. I say in a dry tone: 'Monsieur de Bornier, it is for me to thank you, for you voted for me.'

"'Alas, no. And I deeply regret——'

"'You voted for me, M. le Vicomte. You gave me your word, your word of honour. You are a nobleman. You voted for me, I am certain of it. Yes, yes, my dear colleague, you are a *de* Bornier.'"

* * * * *

THE BYWAY

"Madame is always punctual. She has a mathematical brain. Visits, funerals, weddings, invitations to dinner, people invited to dinner—

she has them all neatly docketed. As for me, it is my weak point. If I have an appointment, I always get there late—when I don't forget altogether. I am incapable of going in a straight line from one place to another. I always take a byway. Say that I am dining out. I am resigned to it and set forth in time. But on the way all sorts of temptations crop up. At the curiosity shop I forget the time. Then I wander along the Embankment looking at books. When but a quarter of an hour's grace remains, suddenly a goddess appears on my path. Like St. Paul at Damascus I am struck by grace: I am felled to the ground. When I arrive at my host's, they are at dessert or sipping liqueur."

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THE LORDLING OF CHAMPAGNE

"My *Joan of Arc* is in great danger, and I count on you, my son, to find the lordling of Champagne."

"The lordling of Champagne?"

"Yes, it's about the Maid in her earliest period—in the state of proof before letters, so to speak. Not far from Vaucouleurs, under King John, a certain peasant, or lordling, or freeman heard voices one day while working in the fields. The voices were imperious and dazzling. They said: 'Go and warn King John not to give battle.' In heaven's despite, King John gave battle, was de-

feated at Poitiers, and taken prisoner together with his sons. What do you say to that? It throws a singular light on the Maid's adventure. The priests who prompted Joan of Arc knew the story, because we know it now. It is from the lordling that they took the alleged prophecy of Joan of Arc about the outcome of the Battle of the Herrings. The nuisance is that I forget myself where I found this lordling who is so decisive. I have been fluttering round the Maid for such a long time! And there have been so many obstacles! I have undergone divorces and house-movings. My books have been divided up and my papers pillaged. Once I found one of my manuscripts—that of *Thais*—in the kitchen. They were just going to make jam-pot covers with it. Never marry, my friend. Marriage rarely makes for the happiness of man. To a man of letters it is fatal. What have they done with my lordling of Champagne? Did you ever hear of him? No. He is as hard to meet as he is decisive. He explains the whole of that inexplicable story. He is the keystone of my thesis. Where did I find him, heavens and earth? In the Senate, when I was librarian? In a book, when I did criticism for the *Temps?* Then the work is lying in the boxes on the Embankment, and adieu to hope! My friend, I go down on my knees to you. You hold in your hands the honour of your old Master and the honour of my Maid. A passage like that, you realize, will pro-

duce a dazzling effect. The lordling is the key. But he will arouse argument. I shall have all the bigots after me and all the archivists. They will cry: 'Where have you got this lordling from that no one has ever heard of before?' If I don't shove a good reference under their snub-noses, I am dishonoured."

"If it was at the time of King John and the Battle of Poitiers, your lordling must be in Froissart."

"That's it! That's it! What am I thinking of? Froissart, of course! Your zeal and insight are marvellous. You are an angel. You are my good angel! Leave everything and fly to the Bibliothèque Nationale, and only come back with the lordling. What a historian Froissart is! A compiler, of course. But there are pearls in his rubbish heap. He shovels things in. He was the journalist of his day. Go to the library, my child. Better this morning than this evening, this evening better than to-morrow. Take pity on a poor historian in trouble. Since I have mislaid my lordling, I have lost my sleep, my appetite, and the zest of life."

For a whole week, at the library, I put the eight volumes of Froissart through the sieve. But no lordling. I am received, at the Villa Said, with extreme coldness.

"You have re-read all Froissart? Perhaps you turned the leaves with a furtive thumb, as if

it were a novel? You are youthful, you are impatient. Oh, I don't reproach you. But I must renounce my *Joan of Arc*. Don't let's speak any more about it! Without the lordling of Champagne my story is bereft of salt: it is a rhapsody."

"Perhaps it is in Jean Lebel?"

"That's it! My lordling must be in Jean Lebel. What were we thinking of? Yes, of course, it's in Jean Lebel. You are an angel, my good angel! Run to the Bibliothèque Nationale. Take Jean Lebel. He is an excellent historian, and the proof is that Froissart plagiarized him. To-morrow you will fly to me with my little lordling of Champagne on your wings. I am certain of it."

Nothing in Jean Lebel. Presently Anatole France leaves for England. Our farewell is wholly without cordiality.

"My friend, we shall meet in a fortnight. Perhaps you will find my lordling of Champagne between this and then. But I hardly expect it: you have not the lucky touch. I ought to have gone to some specialist. Look again, if you like, for it is perfectly useless for you to waste your time over Joan of Arc without the lordling. If I can't find where he came from, I shall burn my Maid. Madame will be enchanted."

A post-card from London. "August 1, 1903. We have had a very bad crossing. Have you found my lordling?" Reply in the negative. Return of Anatole France to Paris. We leave the Maid for

Renan. Anatole France writes and rewrites the speech he is to make at the inauguration of the monument at Tréguier.

"Ah, Renan! He never bothered about references. I ought to do like him about this cursed lordling."

Mid September. Departure for the Gironde.

Telegram. I read on the blue paper. "My dear child I beseech you find the lordling. Your old master Anatole France."

At the Bibliothèque Nationale I have read and re-read Froissart and Lebel and all the chroniclers and all the historians who ever spoke of King John and the Battle of Poitiers. I have asked Champion the father and Champion the son.[1] They have asked the most learned of their customers. No one knows the lordling of Champagne!

October 30. Return of Anatole France. Pneumatic. "I expect you to-morrow morning at the Villa Said." The returns are always affectionate, wheedling almost. He is in great form. He has brought back the breezes of the Gironde in his cheeks. For a considerable time he fishes round about the subject. Then:

"I don't ask you for news of that wretched lordling of Champagne. I know you have done all you could. The people of the Faculty of Letters of Bordeaux have had no better luck. I put them all on the track. They all come back empty-

[1] The celebrated booksellers and publishers of the Quai Malaquais.

handed like you. I asked a professor at Reims into the bargain. I said to myself 'Since the lordling comes from Champagne, let us try a man of Champagne.' The Reims professor to whom I wrote knew nothing whatever about my lordling. So the saying is justified: 'Ninety-nine sheep and one man of Champagne make a hundred beasts.[2] Well, well, let's talk no more of it: life is too short and the lordling is bewitched. Let us say good-bye to Joan of Arc. I have other subjects in my head. What should you say to a Rabelais?"

"From Joan of Arc to Rabelais seems a far cry."

* * * * *

JOAN OF ARC AND RABELAIS

"Not so far as you think. Like the shepherdess of Domrémy, the priest of Meudon risked the stake. It was a near thing with him, and he might easily have gone to it, as she did, covered with infamy. Look at his friend and publisher Etienne Dolet. No, the author of *Pantagruel* escaped by the skin of his teeth from being hunted down by the theologians. But the fact is, that glorified buffoon was a very cunning diplomat. He was wise enough to play the fool. He went his own way, reeling the while. The bottle was his alibi. In reality, our humanist, doctor, theologian, jurist, and diplomat absorbed more oil than wine! He made people laugh with his hiccups. Drunkards

[2] *Bêtes* = both "beasts" and "stupid."—J. P.

always get sympathy. There is a god who watches over them. Laughter is a terrible weapon. I forget who it was said: 'A man's gaiety is the measure of his genius.' That's not at all stupid. In the old ultramontane catechisms you will find melancholy classed among the capital sins. And they were right, by Jove! Rabelais is the greatest of our writers because he is the most laughter-loving. The Maid was refreshingly gay, too. You should see how she snubbed the doctors of divinity at Poitiers.

"Another point of resemblance with the Maid. Rabelais loves France with a perfectly modern love. His is the patriotism neither of caste nor of church. In his eyes France is the *fleurs-de-lis,* a dynastic policy, the royal line of blessed St. Louis. Rabelais, the sacrilegious, who respects nothing, is a swaggering patriot. See with what pleasure he recounts the story of Villon in England. Upon my word he is as proud as the archer of Bagnolet.[1] Ah! Come here a moment, my son."

* * * * *

THE TWO BOOKCASES

He takes my hand and leads me with an air of mystery along the corridor separating the bedroom from the library. We reach the end of the passage. On either side of the window is a bookcase. They are exactly alike. On the top of one is a terra-cotta copy of the Joan of Arc, sculptured

[1] A popular French type of braggart.—J. P.

by the Princesse d'Orleans. On the other the model, in terra-cotta, for the statue of Rabelais put up, I think, at Tours. In the square doctor's cap and with ample doctor's gown enveloping him, the author of illustrious fooleries contemplates ironically, across a wooden rail, the ecstatic shepherdess on the opposite shelf. Both bookcases are overflowing with documents. The books about Joan of Arc are bound uniformly in vellum. On the back they show the arms of the Maid: a sword supporting a crown, between two *fleurs-de-lis*. The titles are penned in blue and red, like the pages of a missal.

The priest of Meudon is less resplendent in bindings of shagreen and morocco.

Anatole France shows me an album where are collected a number of painted documents about Rabelais: portraits of himself and his friends, and pictures of the places he lived in.

In the opposite case he has an album of pictures relating to Joan of Arc. He turns the leaves of one and the other. He sighs for the lordling. Then he shuts the album of the little shepherdess in disgust. "This is mystic stuff," says he: "it's poison!" The Rabelaisian album he clasps in his arms like a beloved child. He carries it off to his room. He feels the weight of it with pride. He breathes in its learned dust. "This," says he, "is mirth: it's the antidote."

* * * * *

THE MAID, A KITE

So it is decided. We will do a Rabelais. Joan of Arc interests him no longer. Her bones shall be left to bigots. Renan once told him the same thing, at a Celtic dinner. "You are working at Joan of Arc, young man? That splendid subject is full of deception. From far off it looks like something. Seen close, it is nothing. A few documents either apocryphal or falsified, fibs, legends, rant, politics, foolishness, fanaticism—that's what you will find. A veritable kite-tail of scraps of paper, stuck together with stories—and what whacking stories! It is the wind of foolishness that blows that foolish toy aloft. My young friend, think no more of such childishness."

Renan was right.

We go out for a walk, and walking, he sketches the plans for his Rabelais. He had intended to go to Orleans for Joan of Arc. Instead, he will go to Tours.

"It's all over with Joan of Arc. This will-o'-the-wisp lordling disenchants me. And then I should simply be soaked in odium over the sainted girl. What mortifications I should have to swallow from the clericals! Don't let's speak of it any more. Still, it was a fine subject; but dark, dark. I began to see light through it, as you see daylight at the end of a tunnel. But I am bogged in my lordling and no one will help me out of the mud."

One afternoon, in the Bibliothèque Nationale,

going for the last time through all the memoirs published by the Historical Society of France, I discover a slender volume: the *Chronicles of the First Four Valois,* edited by Siméon Luce. I open the book and at the first shot strike upon the episode of the lordling of Champagne. For more than three months I had been hunting for him.

Victory! Next morning I go in triumph to the Villa Said. There, a chilly breeze is blowing.

"There must, all the same, be some one in France who knows the lordling of Champagne. Shall I be reduced to putting an advertisement in the papers? I have made you lose your time, my child. At your age, it is true, time has no great value. At mine, it is priceless. My moments are the last drops of an exquisite liqueur. Shall I die without my lordling? He is shortening my days. I ought to have gone straight, like any simpleton, to the *Intermédiaire des Chercheurs et des Curieux.*[1] But I believed in you. People told me so much about your learning and your wisdom. It must be confessed, you are more brilliant than profound. Of course there is in you a certain southern vivacity. But that petulant restlessness is unsuited to solid, difficult research. I needed a grubber, and I took a firework!"

He pursues his discourteous way. Full of false modesty I let him exhaust the bitterness of

[1] The French equivalent of *Notes and Queries.*—J. P.

his soul. After a quarter of an hour of this, I shut the tap.

"My dear Master, I have found your lordling."

"You're not joking?"

"No. I have found your lordling. I have the reference here."

"Where did you discover him, my child? In Froissart?"

"No."

"In Jean Lebel?"

"No. In the *Chronicles of the First Four Valois,* of Luce."

For a moment he sits stupefied. He puts on his spectacles. He takes them off again. He gets up. He sits down. He walks about the room, holding the tails of his dressing-gown like an old woman. He strikes his forehead with a frenzied hand.

"What could I have been thinking of? Yes! The *Chronicles of the First Four Valois.* I read it long ago. I even wrote an article on it. Ah! What a marvellous relief! I feel ten years younger. Away with Rabelais! Joan of Arc's the thing! Madame will shriek like an owl in a fit, but I'm ready for her. What a noble subject! There could be nothing finer or more topical. We will start again at once. If I still believed in God, I should say to you: 'On our knees! On our knees! Let us give thanks to Heaven. Let us raise the Te Deum. Let us sing!' But I have doubts of God, and I had

doubts of you. It is to you that I must give thanks, and to your youthful learning, and southern wisdom."

* * * * *

THE VOTIVE OFFERING

He clasps me in his arms. He embraces me. Upon my word, something wet rolls down my cheek! But the tear is not shed for me. It is for the Maid and the lordling. This outburst over, he rushes away to dig out something and returns carrying the wing of a Spanish altar-screen of gilt wood. Little twisted pillars form a frame for the niches.

"You must put that on your mantelpiece, my child. It is your reward, and my votive offering. It will remind you of the lordling and the Maid and your old Master."

Fresh embrace. From the pockets of his dressing-gown he exhumes a number of statuettes, plaster copies of Tanagras, bronzed over.

"In those little niches were once virgins and saints. I have dedicated the altar to voluptuous little Eastern maidens. See how charming they are. They have just come from bathing. Was it before or after they had gone to meet their lovers? They are rubbing their swift feet with pumice stone. They touch their nails with carmine. What graceful movement they have! It makes their charms the more intimate. Isn't that better than prudish virgins and matrons and sages?"

With the tail of his dressing-gown he rubs up the statuettes.

"I have polished them," he explains, "with linseed oil. That gives the plaster the softness of the skin. Take them, my son. Erect the altar on your bedroom mantelpiece. The virgins of Tanagra shall hold the candle for you."

He gives them a last shine. He seems to part from them with regret. Then he murmurs in my ear:

"Do you see that interrogation mark down there? I put that in with pencil. Without that, would they be women?"

* * * * *

AN ANECDOTE

"The father of a family in the days of Diderot once remarked that his son, already come to man's estate, wanted to be polished up.

"'Your education,' said his father to him one morning, 'is finished. You are a Greek and Latin scholar. You know theology, history, heraldry and you can dance. But you still have to learn the science of society. And that is a science, alas, that the best professors do not possess. Here is a letter for Mme. de X——, who lives in the neighbouring town. You will take it to her from me. She is a lady of infinite grace, wit, and experience. She has lived long in society. I must tell you, moreover, that she did not disdain my own homage. I am asking her to show the same kindness

and indulgence to the son that she showed to the father. Go, my son. I doubt not that with her help you will become a truly polished young man of the world.'

"The son leaves with his letter. He arrives at the lady's house. From the first moment he pleases her. She makes him sit down on an ottoman. She uses all sorts of little tricks to unfreeze him. But all in vain. The more oncoming she grows, the more reserved grows the young man. When she draws nearer, he draws back. Her talk is tender; his, respectful. The lesson begins badly. Can it be that the pupil is without gifts?

"Finally, to thaw the poor innocent, she plays the classic scene of a swoon.

"'Oh, oh! I am dying! These dreadful vapours! Unlace me!'

"O misery! Instead of throwing himself upon her corset-strings, the great gawky fellow rushes for the bell-rope. He rings like Easter chimes.

"Then the good lady opens an eye out of her faint and sighs regretfully.

"'Alas, sir! Do you think to do before my footmen and chambermaid what you could not do when we were alone?'"

* * * * *

DE MAUPASSANT'S TROUSERS

"Long before the *Horla,* I realized that de Maupassant was going off his head. Going to him one day when I thought he was alone I found him

giving an evening party. I caught him in the hall and was excusing myself, on the ground of not being dressed.

"'But why don't you stay?' he asked.

"'You see, I am not in evening clothes.'

"'That's nothing. Look here, will you have mine?'

"And to my stupefaction he began to unbutton his waistcoat and undo his braces. The hall was full of women. He went on:

"'I'll slip my trousers and tail-coat on you.' It was only with the utmost difficulty that I managed to get away from the poor madman."

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INNOCENT GAMES

"There is an ancient witch with false teeth who still plays at being a charmer. The other day she almost eloped with me at Mme. de ——'s door.

"'I won't let you go!' she cried. 'I am too happy! Wherever you are going, that shall be my way! I am enchanted, dear Master, to get a *tête-à-tête* with you!'

"She pushed me into her carriage. Night was falling. In the frenzy of her apostrophizing she seized me by the hands.

"I said to her: 'Madame, would you like to play a little game with me?'

"'Oh, yes,' she cooed, 'an innocent little game!'

"'Innocent, certainly. Let us play at keeping our hands on the carriage door.'

"She stopped the carriage. I got down into the night.

"'Good-bye, Madame.'

* * * * *

DE VIGNY'S AMBITION

"My first essays on Alfred de Vigny smelled abominably of the lamp. I was very young and very ignorant. I inherited from my bookseller father an almost superstitious respect for the aristocracy. Between ourselves Alfred de Vigny's title of nobility was of the most fragile description. He did well to put a pen in his coat of arms. Under the Empire we took him for a stoic, for he was against the imperial regime. In reality he was only an ambitious man, deaf, disappointed, and embittered. He had aspired to be the Prince Imperial's tutor and, as he did not succeed in being Fénélon or Bossuet, he played at being the Incorruptible.

"What distinguishes man from the beast is lying pretence, in a word, literature."

* * * * *

AFFECTIONATE CALUMNIES

When he feels drawn towards anyone, be it a man or woman, he hastens to discover vices in him. He seeks for defects, for failings and eccentricities and even monstrosities. His friendship is not satisfied until it has found a complicated mech-

anism. Normal people do not interest him. His good nature is full of malice. He will explain the talent of one of his friends by alleging that he has perverted tastes. He will paint him to you as the burgomaster of Sodom, so vividly that you might imagine he had been present himself at the saturnalia. Moreover, he will make excuses for his friend. He will let off his eternal saw: "Every one finds his salvation as he can." He will not think that he is in the least offending the laws of friendship by all this. Quite the contrary. His calumnies spring from affection. How often have I not heard him say: "To be sure, So-and so's morals are unorthodox, but he is so witty. Might the gods out of their kindness grant that certain members of the Academy sometimes made similar mistakes of gender!"

Of another of his dearest friends—a friend from childhood—he will say that "He has furtive hands: he is a dear sentimental fellow who cannot refrain from picking up here and there some souvenir out of the show-cases in one's library."

The oldest of all his friends is announced, and he shouts to Josephine in presence of a dozen people:

"Don't leave him alone downstairs for a moment! Keep a sharp eye on my precious objects!"

The oldest friend appears and to the stupefaction of the visitors Anatole France falls on his

neck. He embraces him with frantic delight. He kisses him on both cheeks and sharpens his long nose on them by way of compliment. He seems unable to unlock his arms. Then in a suave voice and with a sweet smile, he will say:

"My dearest So-and-so, I was just talking about you to these gentlemen. I can't say how charmed I am to see you."

* * * * *

THE INFIRMITY OF VIRTUE

The best way to recommend anyone to him is to talk ill of that person. He applies the same specious varnish to women who enjoy his favour. He suspects the innocent among them. Virtue, in the fair sex, is an infirmity. He is always in a hurry over his idylls. Modesty is only found in the badly made. Chastity exists perhaps in the torpid who have no temperament. It ought to be treated, like anaemia or tuberculosis.

He disbelieves in disinterested love.

"I am never in a hurry," he confides to me one morning after a demonstration of his prowess, "to hand the justly earned reward to the divine creature. I have always noticed that the result of doing so is to call to mind a sick aunt, from whom her exemplary niece cannot bear to be longer absent. Then the cage must be opened and off flies the bird with its purse daintily lined, like the sparrow with a crumb in its beak."

* * * * *

THE SCIENCE OF LOVE

"In love, only one thing counts: the rest is mere literary gush. The really great lovers are those women who are best at that. And contrary to what is written in books, much experience is essential: novices are hopeless. The science of love demands delicacy, perseverance, and practice, like the piano.

"To confound love with youth is a great absurdity. Youth is drunk with itself. All the world is a mirror to it. Now love is a science where great erudition and great application is needed. Before the age of fifty, let no man talk of love. Among women some of the elect possess the art when they are about forty.

"How many charming little birds, fascinated by the flashing crown of the Academy, have not come fluttering at me, like larks at an old owl! Well, my dear child, these gaudy passages have always ended in the air. The silly baggages' love was three parts vanity. They could never have their fill of autographs or of éditions de luxe. They wanted to show themselves all over the place with me, at restaurants and theatres. They let me in for stormy scenes with Madame. They were intolerable. They only wanted to talk literature. 'But literature is my job, my little sweet! It's what I've been doing for forty years! Down with literature, and long live love!'

"Everything in this delightful realm, you see,

is prejudice. There is no more cutting insult than to say of a woman: 'She is a professional.' And yet what a marvellous eulogy! To follow the profession of love! You did not know little S——. She used to come here of a morning to do copying, or I would send her to the Bibliothèque Nationale. She was not very attractive, but she was young and ambitious. It was before your day. And I let myself be caught by her youth. Heavens above, what a Calvary! I asked for her heart: she offered me her collaboration. 'Oh, to have my name on a title page with yours!' That, it seemed, was the apex of her Cythera. And then she wanted me to go and be photographed with her! We were to pose in a group with my arm round her. I, in the uniform of an Immortal, with sword and cocked hat. And *Thais* on the table. She, in a simple little frock with a garland of roses. For a whole fortnight she could talk of nothing else. It was madness! I explained to her that it was contrary to the statutes of the Académie Française; that it constituted a formal ground for expulsion; that two of our colleagues, Furetières and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre had been ignominiously turned out for having been photographed with their lady friends, at a fair. She said to me:

"'About the abbé of course, that was quite right. Darling, I don't want to cause you trouble. I know how to keep in my proper place.'

"Her stupidity was divine.

"Some days afterwards she brought me a photograph that she had unearthed in a bookshop near the Théâtre Français. I figured in it, not as an academician, but with magnificent moustaches and the Legion of Honour. I looked like an officer. She cried, wept, sighed, and sulked so much that I copied out a sonnet from the *Poemes Dorés* on the back of the martial portrait. Of course I told her that I had composed it for her. And then, as always, we quarrelled. The idiot sent the photograph to Madame. Ah, my friend! What a storm!"

* * * * *

NOTHING IN THE BUTTONHOLE

"I haven't worn my decoration since the Dreyfus case. I sent it back, together with Solomon Reinach, when Zola's name was erased from the list of the Legion of Honour. After all, what does an author want with a scrap of ribbon in his buttonhole? If he is really known, his works are a finer decoration than any that all the ministers in the world can confer on him. These distinctions have nothing to do with literature. They are just intelligible in the case of a soldier who has performed some deed of bravery. He has his uniform to start with. The star of courage is added. It is a little elementary, but it enables him to be recognized as a hero. But if you stuck all the stars of heaven in the buttonhole of my morning coat, would that tell the passer-by: 'This is the author

of *Thais* or of *Joan of Arc'?* And if they know it, what need have I of the bauble?"

* * * * *

A POSITIVIST DEMONSTRATION

There was a moment when he was a Positivist, together with Lafitte. But he did not keep a very respectful memory of the master or of the disciple. He accuses that withered philosophy of leading, not to a knowledge of the beginning and the end of things, but to resignation. He ironically describes the chapel in Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, and the will, shown like a relic, and the cup of Clothilde de Vaux. The loves of the philosopher seem to him ridiculous. Not that a philosopher cannot be in love. On the contrary, Love is the sole philosophy that does not lead to deception, that has an end and an aim. But he holds that in the carnal sense—the true sense—Auguste Comte did not know what love is.

"Lafitte got himself made sacristan to the Comtist Chapel. He explained everything in this vast universe by Auguste Comte. His ecstasy bordered on delirium. One day he was acting as guide to a charming young lady at Versailles. He showed her the town and the palace, according to the Positivist gospel—that is to say, at great length. Lafitte was a peculiarly discursive Positivist. And thus he took the fair inquirer along a pretty busy street, to a certain square close to the Tennis Court. It was there, if one might believe him, that the French Revolution began. 'There,'

said he, showing the wall, on which some little scamp from the neighbouring school had scrawled a remarkably naughty drawing, 'there is the explanation of the entire catastrophe of the monarchy.' And his insistent stick pointed, for the sweet miss's benefit, to the symbol of pride. Without lowering his stick, he continued: 'You cannot meditate too deeply in front of this wall. Here a new order began.'

"Eleven o'clock struck. The neighbouring school let loose all its menagerie of little monkeys, who watched with eager eyes of mocking irony, an old gentleman showing their wicked tricks to a young lady, just as their master showed them problems on the blackboard.

"But the Positivist neophyte sank her eyes and appeared to be counting the stones."

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ST. FRANCIS' ROSES

"Since I know that you are a devotee of St. Francis, I have brought you back a miraculous rose from Italy. Its petals, you see, have the stigmata, just like the hands and feet of the blessed Father. The precious flowers are gathered by the sisters from the legendary rose-tree. Doubtless they put them to dry in their prayer-books. Then they gum little points of drawing-paper on to the petals and sell them for a small sum to pilgrims. Who could refuse to give a lira for a rose beaded with St. Francis' blood?

"You know the edifying history of these roses?

One day the saint felt a violent carnal temptation. It was in the depth of a hard winter. Snow covered the convent garden. Yet the Evil One watched. So deep did his sting bite into the flesh, that the holy Father thought himself vanquished. Hastily tearing off his gown he rolled, all naked, into a bush of sweet-brier. Miracle! Under the dew of blood the black twigs grew green again and, in the snow, put forth roses. And to perpetuate the victory of the saint over the impure Spirit the roses bore and still bear, as you see, the sacred stigmata. I plucked this one in a bazaar kept by the nuns. They assured me of its authenticity and I do not doubt it, for the legend is beautiful. Between ourselves, the gift may be dangerous. How you would curse your old master if he brought you back a talisman that overcame temptations of the flesh! Be reassured, then, for I have worn it on my heart, or in my pocket-book, all the way from Perugia, and the Franciscan rose has not worked. It is inoffensive. I think even that it may—But you will see. You will tell me what the results are. Perhaps I was wrong to give you St. Francis' rose; for is not the rose of youth yours already?"

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THE RAM IN THE CONVENT

"What astonishes me is that I was not sold in the same bazaar some hairs of the wolf of Gubbio, or a little bunch of feathers from the wild doves that St. Francis tamed, or even some yards of flannel made from the wool of the lamb he saved from

the slaughter-house in memory of the Lamb of God, who wiped away the sins of the world. These *Fioretti* of St. Francis are little fables. They exhale an ingenuous roguishness that often remind me of our own La Fontaine. I sometimes think I should like to write an epilogue to these legends. The bad wolf of Gubbio, you know, died of old age, and his end was very edifying. He used to go into the houses, doing no harm to any one, and gnaw bones that people threw to him and to the dogs under the table. No one was afraid of him, not even little children, who used to get delightedly on his back. For St. Francis' sake, I think, the inhabitants regretted him. As for the lamb, he was put *en pension,* if I am right, with the sisters of Saint Clara. Out of consideration for the saint, he was admitted to the nunnery, although of male sex. The legend does not speak of a ewe lamb, but of a lamb simply. He was infinitely petted, like *Vert-Vert,* in *Les Visitandines.*[1] As long as he was small the sisters would dispute which of them should make room for him at night in her cell. But he grew up, my friend. He lost his baptismal innocence, even as you and I. The lamb gave place to a ram, a beast with horns like the devil, full of lewdness and obstinacy. The ram became intolerable to the convent. He ate the rose-bushes in the cloisters—rose-bushes from a cutting of the famous rose-bush with the stigmata. He did many

[1] The eighteenth century comic opera by Picard and Devienne. —J. P.

other things that I cannot tell you, for they were the reverse of edifying. Things came to such a pass that the sisters were forced to go to the wolf of Gubbio and beg him to become a bad wolf again, for the sake of their holy order. That is how it came about, my friend, that the pious wolf of Gubbio gobbled up St. Francis' lamb, that had become a ram."

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THE ACADEMY WITH THE CUPOLA

"Why does the Republic tolerate such an institution? It is an association of reactionaries. The Revolution suppressed it. When the Institute was founded, Bonaparte would not hear of it. Then Lucien was got to intervene. He yielded, but changed the name; and the Académie Française became 'The Class for Language and Literature.' It was an academy of the second class, because the first was that of which the victorious engineer was a member. But the Restoration gave back her primacy to the daughter of the great cardinal. To-day it is an *imperium in imperio*. We have the Chamber, the Senate, and the Academy. The Chamber, elected by universal suffrage, is the antechamber of the Senate and the Academy. The Forty are extremely adroit in the admission of politicians to their ranks. It is a vital question for them. If they displayed as much industry and genius in their works as they do in certain elections, the ages of Augustus and Louis XIV would pale before my own. A man has been everything

—deputy, senator, minister, President of the Republic—but he still has something more to get: the Academician's chair. After the chair there is nothing to come but the coffin: it is the top notch. And that supreme ambition puts all the wheels of the Constitution out of gear. Think of the reactionary atmosphere that those supposed friends of the people breathe in the old chapel at the end of the Pont des Arts! There are prelates, and squires, and generals there—all enemies of the republican state, yet they enjoy official prestige. They inhabit a state palace. They wear a uniform, a ridiculous one, it's true. They are so rich! There is no old maid but leaves her dividends, parrots, canaries and tom-cats to the Academy. The Academy distributes yearly innumerable prizes and, what is much more valuable, dispenses a veritable budget without any control. The greater part of the money goes to religious congregations, to disloyal associations, to right-minded authors—that's to say authors without any mind! The Cupola is the headquarters of a sort of literary and moral corruption agency. How can it be attacked? It is invulnerable. Our most illustrious politicians will commit any baseness to be admitted into the learned body.

"Perhaps there might be a means of succeeding. G. B—— who is in the Council of State, suggested a legal expedient to me. Like all Jews, G. B—— is very specious. 'We must,' he said, 'strike at the Academy through its funds.' We

have, it seems, the entire administration of our finances and we enjoy a sort of budgetary autonomy. There is no control. We manage our fortune without accounting to any one. In his rabbinical way G. B—— said to me: 'That is monstrous! That is unheard of! That is illegal!' I don't know why he is so incensed against the great cardinal's daughter, but anyway he is highly incensed. In all the other administrations, he remarks, the control of the State is imposed on finance. For example: funds paid into court, and annuity offices are so controlled. It must be insisted that henceforth no sum should be paid to the Academy or by the Academy without authority from the minister of finance. At first everything would go as smoothly as possible. The velvet glove alone would be visible. The interest of the illustrious society itself, its glory, its prestige, or some other wheedling nonsense would serve as a pretext. If the Academy kicked, pressure could be put on it by a revolutionary motion in Parliament. Why should the Academy be preserved since the religious associations have been suppressed? What need is there for it in a democracy? Then it could be driven from the buildings it occupies. It was Napoleon who gave them to it. The College of the Four Nations was not his to give. He had not inherited it from his uncle the archdeacon of Ajaccio. Can you imagine the Academy without its Cupola? Why, it would be like a sausage without mustard! The mere threat of expulsion would

make it conciliatory. It would resign itself to the formality of presenting accounts. Then another gentle push would be made. Since the State undertook the accountancy of the Immortals' finances and the treasury issued the receipts, it would only be proper that the funds themselves should be paid to the State. What risk would they run? Then—victory! It would amount to confiscation! And there would be the Academy as poor as a church mouse! When it no longer had money or cupola or chairs, what the dickens would it become?"

* * * * *

THE PROFESSION OF DYING

"The profession of arms was not held by the ancients in such honour as people would have us think. Remember Horace's ode to Iccius, who deserted philosophy to become a soldier."

France recites the ode, and comments on it:

"'What! You turn eyes of longing on the rich treasures of the Arabians! You forge chains for the war-like Parthians! What barbarian girl will become the slave of her lover's slayer? What young Indian, trained by his father to shoot with the bow, will have the honour to serve you as cup-bearer, with his lovely perfumed hair? Let the Tiber turn again towards its source rather than you should desert the school of Socrates for that of Mars!'

"What does that mean in plain language? That a soldier's profession is the vilest of professions, unworthy of a philosopher's brain; and that

if a decent man becomes a soldier, it is in the hope of pillage. There is no patriotism whatever in it, but the thirst for riches and licentiousness. The young slave and the young Indian with the lovely hair, those are the noble laurels that tempt the war-like philosopher. The same ideas, moreover, were current in France of old. 'The grand name of soldier,' says Corneille; but he forgets the unworthy etymology of the word, which means a paid man, and one badly paid too. Our old historians found no words too vile to designate this generous profession. 'Lackey, footman, prowler,' says Monstrelet. 'Hireling, plunderer, waster,' says Froissart. It is only in our times that we have made the profession of dying the first of all. We have created a new crime, the crime of anti-militarism. In France of old no one thought it scandalous to cry: 'Down with war!' Only one caste in the nation was war-like. In the moment of danger that caste took the lead of bands of mercenaries, like lost children, who fought without well knowing why or against whom. In time of peace men were grateful to the warrior caste and as a guarantee against war tolerated the nobles' pride and their immunities and privileges. But they were held incapable of doing anything else but fight. The artisan worked. The merchant traded. The magistrate judged. The priest prayed, and the noble had his courage. It would have seemed ridiculous for a counter-jumper to want to be a soldier. A characteristic incident is related in the

Memoirs of Arnaud d'Andilly. Being in command of a camp, he perceived an officer's servant helping some soldiers to construct a fort. He fell on the man and beat him. 'You insolent, forward fellow!' he cried. '*You* think to do a soldier's work! Soldiery is the profession of princes.' The king is the first soldier of his kingdom. You have not forgotten the taunts levelled against Boileau and Racine, the King's historiographers. They arrived at the precise moment to find the battle won and the campaign over. But they got out of it by their witticisms. What, were men of letters to be taken for men at arms? Military equality is one of the conquests of the great Revolution. There are nowadays as many heroes as Frenchmen. No one need be of a good family to be killed now. He who kicks at dying is no good Frenchman!"

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AN IRRESISTIBLE ARGUMENT

"Don Quixote was plagiarized by Quevedo, who made a sort of pious tale out of it. The Knight of the Melancholy Countenance became the Knight of the Immaculate Conception. Some of the episodes are irresistibly funny. Sancho one day sees a Moorish woman. In his heart he commits adultery with her. He sighs: 'Would to heaven that all the bugs in my bed were changed into creatures like her!' We are in Spain, a country infested with bugs. I know something about it: I have been there. Sancho's outburst saddens the Knight of the Melancholy Counte-

nance and of the Immaculate Conception. He pitches into his squire. 'What!' cries he, 'your blasphemy is enough to bring down fire from heaven upon your head! It is true, your wife is a toothless, hairless old crone. She is blear-eyed and incapable of arousing passion. But she is a Christian! Whereas that fair Moor has not been baptized! Do you comprehend the difference?"

* * * * *

THE MADMAN FROM MARSEILLES

Josephine had let in a madman. He throws himself at Anatole France's feet and floods his slippers with tears. He sobs: "I am from Marseilles. I was a cobbler, when the truth appeared to me! Then I sold my business and have abandoned my wife and children to pursue the truth. I have brought you a Constitution which will assure happiness to the peoples; for you are a friend of humanity—a true friend!" So saying he draws from his pocket a manuscript and a revolver. Anatole France attempts to soothe him. "Be calm, my friend," says he, "and speak low. The enemies of humanity are on the watch." "Ah, yes!" sighs the madman, "well I know it. I have barely succeeded in throwing them off my track. They tried to derail the express from Marseilles. They bribed cab-drivers to run me down. But I have found you! You love humanity. Here is my book."

France takes the roll of manuscript, unfolds

it, turns the pages. Then, slapping his thigh, he cries: "I have been waiting for you. I have been waiting for you, my friend!" And he embraces the madman in his arms. But meanwhile he manages to abstract the pistol. "You have written what I thought but dared not write. Now I can die in peace! This must be published for the benefit of humanity." "Yes, yes," repeats the madman, weeping like a waterspout. "Take a cab," continues Anatole France, "and before the rabble know that you are here, go to F—— the publisher. I would offer to go with you, but I am too well known. I will give you a letter. He will publish your book. I promise you. Adieu, philosopher! Speed and prudence! Straight, to F——!" He scribbles some words on a card. "I am fastening the envelope, to avoid possible indiscretion. Don't lose the letter!" The man from Marseilles goes off with his constitution and letter of introduction.

"Ouf," says France, "that was a near thing."

"Might I ask you, my dear Master, what you have written?"

"I wrote: 'Here is a furious maniac. Telephone to the nearest asylum and keep him amused till they bring the strait-waistcoat.'"

* * * * *

A HOLIDAY

One Saturday after lunch Anatole France refuses to go to the room upstairs.

"To-day," he announces, "I am going to take a holiday, I thoroughly deserve it."

Madame makes a face.

"You are as lazy as a schoolboy. Come! A little courage. I will show you the example."

"No, I have decided to go this afternoon to my friend Prouté at the print shop. I have written to him and he expects me. He is such a good fellow that I wouldn't disappoint him for all the world. Go to the workroom if you feel like it. As for me, I am off to the Rue de Seine, to look through some boxes of prints. You have told me that I am like a child: you see I must have pictures."

"But to-morrow is Sunday and a day of rest."

"I know. A day of rest and a reception day. A swarm of prigs will invade your drawing-room and madden us with their chatter. Another Sunday lost! No, no, no, no! I won't write a line to-day, I solemnly swear. I have dedicated my afternoon to my old friend Prouté and I shall keep word. Madame, I kiss your hand. Are you coming, Brousson?"

Madame changes her tactics. Smiles pervade her face. Her voice grows soft, and she says in honeyed tones:

"Very well then. Since it is impossible to get you to work, I will come with you."

"No, no! I could not be so cruel as to accept such a sacrifice. Your health is too precious to me. It's too hot. Stay and rest, I beg you. I

should hate compelling you to walk. Brousson and I will just pay a flying visit to Prouté, and be back for supper."

Behind Madame's back M. Bergeret winks and points at me like an urchin setting off on a lark.

But she does not give in.

"How keen you are about this old print shop, to be sure! Are you really going to the Rue de Seine. I wonder? I suspect you are plotting some prank with your fine secretary. Well, well, I propose to stick to you, so we shall see."

"That will indeed be delightful," responds Anatole France in a voice like a funeral sermon. "I should not have ventured to ask you to come."

We start out. It is very hot. M. Bergeret's hopes are fixed on the temperature. He suggests that Madame should drive.

"I cannot bear, dear friend, to see you on foot in this furnace. Take this cab, and let us meet there. Myself I am in need of a walk, to set my digestion right. I feel thoroughly torpid: I must have exercise."

"So must I," replies she, hooking her arm into the Master's.

He makes one last effort to escape.

"The fact is that Brousson and I want to have a long talk on a subject that I know is specially boring to you: Joan of Arc."

"Talk of what you like, please. I shall not say a word."

"What I fear," sighs France in tones of contrition, "is that we are not in sympathy."

"Don't talk such rubbish, and open my parasol."

We obey like recruits being gone for by the corporal. But M. Bergeret elects to go by the most capricious route imaginable. He avoids the shade. He chooses the longest and hottest way. You would think he wanted to exhaust the lady on her rickety high Louis XV heels. He spies an old curiosity shop, or a bookseller's—and dashes off to it, leaving her on the scorching asphalt and taking her parasol with him to inspect some treasure in the window.

"It's nothing of interest," he announces in the most innocent way as he comes back.

This manœuvre is repeated a score of times. He sees a pastry-cook's in passing and breaks into an ecstasy over the buns and cream-cakes.

"Ah, how delicious those cakes look! I declare they make my mouth water."

"Why, we have just got up from table!"

"And what of that?"

"A good deal, I should say. To see you rolling your eyes at those wretched pastries—you can see that it is a shop of the lowest class—a mere baker's veneered over—one might think you had had nothing to eat. It is an insult to my luncheon!"

"You don't like the look of the cakes? Very well, then. They are too simple for your taste? Quite right. Goddesses, who are nourished on

nectar and ambrosia, must find earthly food commonplace. But here is a café. Perhaps an ice would find favour in your eyes?"

"I don't want any more of your suggestions. This sun is hot enough to cook a dinner by. You feel impelled to go and look at engravings and drawings. You want to make this singular pilgrimage on foot, so as to talk about Joan of Arc with your secretary from Gascony——"

"From Languedoc."

"Languedoc or Gascony—it's all one. I am so foolish as to take your nonsense seriously. And not content with wasting your own time, you must make me waste time. Give me the parasol. You don't even know how to hold it."

Then France turns to me:

"In October 1428 the situation of Orleans was by no means as desperate as it is painted by the majority of historians, who are partisans of the Maid's miracle. . . ."

For two good hours, from the Avenue de la Grande Armée to the Rue de Seine, in the midst of the tumult of carriages and omnibuses, the Master delivers a veritable lecture on the situation of France in the year when Joan, the little shepherdess of Domrémy, had her visions.

From time to time he stops in the middle of a crossing to quote some specially decisive text. He calls to witness public opinion in general and Madame in particular. Madame entrenches herself in sulky silence. She marches with military

strides. Her high heels ring on the pavement and she brandishes her parasol like a pike. She is a picture of the goddess of war.

At last we reach Prouté's. Calm seems to return in the cool dimness of the shop.

But as Madame is very short-sighted and likes to pass for having excellent vision, he amuses himself by showing her drawings the wrong way up.

"What do you think of this little Natoire?"

"Delicious!"

"Do you think it is genuine?"

"Of course! Look at the misty background."

"True. But you would see it much better if you looked at it the other way: you are holding it upside down."

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THE LEATHER FAN

He has asked Madame to buy him a fan made out of leather. Madame is completely stupefied.

"A fan made out of leather? Where, I should like to know, am I to find such a thing? They were in use under Louis Philippe, in the good old days of your grandmother."

"I doubt if my grandmother used a fan. She was a sort of vivandière."

"But why leather?"

"Because one can write upon it."

"Write what?"

"Verses."

"You want to write verses upon fans?"

"Upon a fan. I'm not proposing to make it my profession."

"That's a pity. You might perhaps earn a livelihood. And who is this unique fan for? A lady, I suppose?"

"Naturally. You would not like me to compose verses and write them out with my own hand for a man."

"Really now, I might prefer it. And is the lady of the fan young? At least does she look young? Is this leather fan her idea? She must be fresh from the country and be eager to go back with her trophy. She will have a great success at the ball at the sub-préfecture! She will bear aloft your fan, and your verses and signature will be her standard. Really, can any one be such an innocent as you? You have the reputation of being the subtlest writer of your time and, it must be confessed, with pen in hand you do come up to your reputation. But in life your conduct is that of a schoolboy. Your ingenuousness is so startling as to be positively laughable. The first skirt you see can twist you round her finger. I should like to know your lady of the fan!"

"She is one of your friends."

"A friend of mine—mine? No, no, no. I know how to choose my friends. They are neither ridiculous nor tiresome. Can you imagine me running round the shops hunting for a leather fan? 'A leather fan, madam? For what object?' 'For Monsieur Anatole France of the Académie Fran-

çaise to write a testimony of his ardour for some blue-stocking or other he is smitten with!' Cover yourself with ridicule if you like. But I shall not buy this leather fan."

"Very well. I will go myself."

"You'll go. Oh, yes! You will commit any sort of absurdity. You will pay whatever you are asked for the disgusting object. 'A hundred francs? Here they are!' Oh, I know you. It's not even as if this coquette would even reward you for your expenditure! She is simply some creature bitten with the collecting mania. Do you know what she will do with your leather fan? She will use it two or three times and then sell it to an autograph hunter to put in his collection as evidence of your silly amorousness! I can picture your fan in Barthou's possession. Where are you off to, pray?"

"To Dussossoy in the Avenue de l'Opéra to buy the leather fan that is upsetting your charming temper."

"Stop. I'll come with you. You would never manage it alone. Besides, my little Louis XV fan with the mother of pearl needs to be repaired. Perhaps we might exchange it for another. Dussossoy always has a good selection. *I* am not one of those women who are content with leather fans."

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KNEES: MILITARY AND MODEST

"Yesterday I had a really mortifying mishap. It began so promisingly, too. I will tell you all about it. Maybe my confession will wipe away my fatuousness.

"I was dining with the X——'s. One of their grand dinner parties. I had the place of honour, on the right of the lady of the house. She is a lady of a certain age but pleasingly plump—a ripe autumn fruit. Eating, we talk; and talking, I suddenly feel under the table a pressure against my knee. I am literally galvanized, for my hostess passes for being a lady of the strictest virtue. Eh, said I to myself, that was a sly move! And I pursue the conversation, somewhat disturbed. Again! A renewed pressure! What would you have done in my place? True, I am no Adonis. But neither is the lady a Venus. I am no longer in my first youth, you'll say. But she must be round about fifty! And think of her virtue! So much the more reason for it. As some one or other has said: 'Every good woman occasionally tires of her trade.' Then why should she not take a rest from her virtue in my company? I am still brisk. I am discreet, and more or less at liberty. A fresh pressure! This time absolutely definite. It is no longer a sly move: it's an invitation. It is a command! What would you have done in my place? I reply warmly. In imagination I admire the impassive lady's knees. I fondle them. They must, I feel sure, be supple, with smooth skin and the most

seductive dimples. Do these appealing knees turn in or turn out? There are the two styles, you know. For myself, I confess, I incline towards those that turn inwards. They speak to me of indefinable modesty, of mysterious shy refinement, of concentrated voluptuousness. The knee turned inwards attracts me: the other chills me. Some one, I forget who, but a man of real judgment, has well defined them. The one he calls: 'the knee military,' and the other: 'the knee modest.'

"This problem then absorbs me: has my neighbour the knee military, or the knee modest? Mine is martial and mystic by turns. I have the impression that we are making progress, and some anxiety lest my pleasure become too obvious. Perhaps you think these details needless and vulgar? In this deplorable age we excel in debasing the most estimable practices. People say contemptuously: 'He—or she—made advances with his foot—or with her knee.' But is that not the highest expression of love? We treat the fair one whom we adore, and from whom we hope for happiness, as a divinity. To pray to God is to make advances with your knee to God—to go on your knees. But one cannot go on praying for ever. One must work, as the greatest saints testify. There is a moment for everything. I bend down, and under pretence of looking for my napkin, I slip my hand under the table cloth. Ah, my friend, what a blow! It was that idiotic table cloth making me advances with its knee! It was much too large and had been

tied up in a knot, and it was the knot that was flapping against my legs.

" ' What are you looking for? ' said the virtuous lady. ' You look quite upset.' "

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THE FAIR GARDEN OF SAYINGS

" My father was grandiloquent and bombastic: my mother on the contrary was simplicity itself. It is from her that I got my style. She excelled in telling stories. In her mouth the commonest things became fascinating and amusing. Her talk was like a garden, one of those country gardens of which it is impossible to say whether they are flower gardens, or vegetable gardens, or orchards, or parks; where use and delight are mingled, and you can gather roses and strawberries; one of those gardens scented with jasmine and tarragon and chives. My mother was not highly educated. She read little but her cookery book and her prayer book, but she had inherited from her parents a wonderful number of rustic sayings which she threw, like flowers, into the conversation. Her sentences gave me my first idea of form inspired by good sense and grace. My dear mother taught me the A,B,C in proverb. I am still very fond of them and study all the collections of them. That of Le Roux de Lincy is always on my table, and I often refresh myself with it. It is like taking a turn in the garden I spoke of just now, full of roses and fruit, where the bushes speak to you; and I come back rested, with smiles in my mind. Nowadays

proverbs are despised. Democracy finds them too simple and childish. Poor democracy! I have long had the idea of making a little collection for children, for strictly between ourselves I have written books for children; prize books and class books. But I never speak of them, because I fear that I did not succeed. It is much easier to write for grown-ups than for kiddies. You can persuade grown men that it is the thing to read such and such a work. And they read it. They praise it. But when a child is bored, it tears up the page and makes a chickabiddy or a boat with it.

"I should have liked to gather, in the fair garden of rustic sayings, a little book of proverbs. I would have arranged them according to the days and the months. In December the little ones would have learned what was appropriate to it: Christmas, presents, the snow. In the lovely month of May: spring, roses, love. Ah yes! Why not love? They are taught to speak the name of God, before they know what God is. In August, the harvest. In October, the vintage; and there is many a saying about wine, the great consoler. It would have been a little book, of the same size, and perhaps the same interest, as La Fontaine's fables."

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THE GENERAL DOES HIS EXERCISES

His talent for extracting the comic side from people and things is remarkable. He uses much ingenuity in placing the simpletons who come to pay him homage in comic or even farcical situations,

without their knowing it. He overwhelms them with questions and expressions of affection. He invites their confidence. He strips them bare, then sticks nick-names on them and dresses them up to his own taste. Thenceforth they carry their fool's caps to eternity. It is impossible to behold them afterwards without laughing. They look as if they had escaped from the *Histoire Contemporaine*.

One of the queerest figures in the collection is the General de V——. He is still young. He resigned at the time of the affair of the inventories.[1] He is the type of comic opera hero: conquering blonde moustaches, a bit touched up, and on his pate a network of hair, arranged like a cobweb. And his voice! It is the voice of the word of command. In a small quiet Paris drawing-room, encumbered with furniture and wadded with carpets and hangings, he trumpets forth commonplaces as though he were on horseback in battle array.

Good General de V—— has a marriageable daughter. Mademoiselle Solange forms an inexhaustible source of specious questions for Anatole France. Solange is as fair as the day! As discreet as the night! She excels in everything: playing the piano and making jam. She embroiders like a fairy! Rides like the Queen of the Amazons! And she is religious. She is a pearl. She is a lily. "And Solange doesn't get married! It's the fault

[1] The consequence of the law of separation passed by the Combes Ministry.—J. P.

of the Republic, by G—d, sir!" Solange has no dowry.

General de V—— was for a long time in the colonies. He brought back fever with him. But he has got rid of it by the daily practice of gymnastics. Where everything else failed—quinine, doctors, syrups, pills, flannel belts—gymnastics have done marvels! A particular system of gymnastics: for there are gymnastics and gymnastics.

Anatole France brings out his most sugary voice.

"General," he implores, "my digestive apparatus is seriously deranged."

"It's your own fault. You should do gymnastics."

"Yes, but at my age, trapezes and rings and horizontal bars——!"

"There's no question of exhibitions like that, but of rational gymnastics! Every morning for a quarter of an hour."

"A quarter of an hour every morning—but where?"

"In your bedroom when you get up."

"In your shirt?"

"I should just think so. Sunday best is not for that! The muscles must be at their ease. Would you like a demonstration?"

"My dear General, I shouldn't have ventured to ask you."

"First of all the exercise of 'the sloughi'.[2] For

[2] An African greyhound.—J. P.

five minutes you run round the room like this on all fours. You follow?"

"Not very well."

"I shall begin again then. You must go quick; as quick as a hound after a hare. Then for another five minutes, you do 'the pony': you jump over the chairs and prance! To end up with, you do 'the dead man.'"

"That sounds easy."

"Less so than you think, my dear France. Look here. You lie on your back on the floor. As if you were floating, see?"

The General illustrates by stretching himself flat on the floor.

"You stretch your arms out."

"Like Jesus on the cross?"

"Like Jesus, if you like. I am not fond of such profane comparisons. You are incorrigible, in spite of your genius. Then you lift your legs, slowly, little by little. No more stomach-aches, my dear fellow! Not a single stomach-ache afterwards! You can send the doctor and all his nostrums to the dickens. If you do that every morning for a quarter of an hour, you will grow twenty years younger."

"Oho," says France, "that seems worth while."

"You will have the stomach of a child."

"Well, let's say of a lad."

"Just look at mine."

The General has got up again. He drums proudly on his abdomen.

"Not the slightest wrinkle! Not the least fat! A stomach of twenty, and I am sixty-three! Every one at home does the exercises in the morning, even Solange. Ah yes, if you could only see her . . .!"

* * * * *

A COMPOSITE PORTRAIT

Not a day passes but a painter from the Old World or the New turns up at the Villa Said with his paraphernalia. In vain Josephine shuts the door on them. The artist unpacks on the front steps, fixes his easel in the middle of the path and smokes his pipe philosophically squatting on his camp-stool. He is a man of patience. He will catch the Master as he comes out. It is likewise with photographers.

Ordinarily the Master is accessible to artists. He complains of their importunity, but yields to it.

"Why should I be painted again? The time for that is past! I am white-haired and wrinkled. Ah, if only I were still young! But I am over sixty. I am no longer an Antinous! Yes, I know. You want my portrait for its historical value, to preserve for posterity. Paint some one a bit better looking for posterity then, and not a poor quavering, shaky old fellow. Praxiteles took the loveliest maids of Greece as models for his Venus. That's what you should do for your Anatole France. Choose the finest man. Take the figure of one, the calf of another, the features of a third. Crown the whole with abundant curly locks, the colour of hyacinth. I am not very sure what the

colour of hyacinth is. But I have read in authors of antiquity that it was highly reputed. And under all these marvels write: 'Anatole France.' Then it will have a fine effect on our great-nephews and, still more, on our great-nieces. They won't read my rubbish. But when they look at the composite image they will sigh: 'He was some lad, old Anatole.'"

* * * * *

THE SUFFERING MODEL

The hard thing for an artist is to get him to sit. Once this is accomplished the Master is as amenable as a child. All his complaints notwithstanding, he never thinks there are enough portraits of himself. He gives himself endless trouble and will upset his house and his habits and his programme to facilitate the painter's task.

"Where do you wish me to sit? Do you like this place? What about my dressing-gown? Will it fit in with your colour scheme? No? Too neutral? You are quite right. I will change it. And my cap? Is it bright enough? I have a whole series of them. Choose yourself. I will put on whichever one you like. I am entirely at your service."

And it is true; painters do what they will with him. They put him in an armchair, against the light, and profile, for he is much better looking profile, and he knows it. They pile huge folios on his stomach so that the poor great man could not read a line. They forbid him to cross his legs

and to turn his head. But what they cannot do is to prevent his talking. At the end of the sitting Anatole France stretches himself. He sighs, and generally says:

"Man is a model of suffering."

He looks at the canvas. He is rarely satisfied, but conceals his discontent. He overwhelms the painter with portentous compliments. He is an Apelles! A Rubens! A Michael Angelo! Thanks to him Anatole France will brave the waters of oblivion. His books will pass, but the portrait will live eternally. He embraces the painter with effusion.

The artist has hardly gone down the staircase when:

"What a dauber! Happily we are not compelled to look like our portraits!"

* * * * *

MULTIPLICATION

"I unearthed this little Leda from an antique shop on the Embankment. She is ravishing. Wouldn't you like to be in the swan's place? There is a certain softness in the painting. Perhaps it is of the school of Boucher. In any case the little picture is truly voluptuous. I was carrying off, clasped to my heart, the wife of Tyndareus whom Jupiter cuckolded—and a great honour it was for the husband as well as for the wife—when up came T—— the celebrated Jewish curio dealer. I was so innocent as to show him my acquisition. 'It is a good thing,' he declared after sniffling my

Leda up and down as if it were a sample of cloth. Then he asked:

"'How much did you give for that woman with the goose?'

"'It's not a goose; it's a swan.'

"'No matter. What did you get it for?'

"'Two hundred francs.'

"'So much the worse for you.'

"'Why, was two hundred francs too dear?'

"'No certainly not. But you would have done much better to pay ten thousand for your little canvas. Nowadays you always get double. You would have sold it again for twenty thousand instead of four hundred. That would have been a good day's work for you.'

"'But I don't buy pictures to sell them again.'

"'Then why do you go buying second-hand things?'

"I did not know what to answer him. You might as well try to explain love and its passions to a eunuch slave-dealer."

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THE KISS TO THE LEPER

This morning, Wednesday, being reception day, I had a slight mishap. Whether it was the cold, or what, I do not know, but I was taken faint during the reception. It only lasted a short time and a few drops of rum set me right. I thought no more about it, when, after the departure of his admirers, the Master inquired after my health:

"You swooned away, my child, like Esther

before Ahasuerus. Whence came your emotion, pray? Was it the result of some little debauch last night?"

"No. Last night I went to bed very early with a maid."

"With a maid?"

"Yes. Your maid. Joan of Arc."

"It was not she who put you in such a state. Are you subject to this weakness?"

"It is the first time it has happened to me or, to be quite frank, the second. I fainted once at school on Easter day while the deacons and the sub-deacons were chanting the Passion. Suddenly everything turned round me and I heard no more Jesus, Barabbas, and Judas, but fell to the ground clasping my laurel branch."

"What rare piety! You had your heart pierced at the sight of the sufferings of your God."

"No. Simply the service was too long and I was perishing of hunger. I had nothing inside me but a little bit of dry bread. And then the scent of the flowering laurels that changed the chapel into a murmuring forest, went to my head."

"Have you a good digestion?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I must tell you something, my young friend, and you, think what you will of it. I do not like sick people. Suffering is repugnant to me. It is a sort of instinct. When I was at Stanislas,[1] there

[1] The ecclesiastical school where Anatole France was educated. —J. P.

was what they call the Debate of St. Vincent de Paul. One by one the students who took part in it went round attic and garret to take bread, meat, or medicines to the sick lying there. They profited by the good work of course to leave chaplets and medallions about. They lectured the sick and confessed them. The great idea was not to cure them but to prepare them for death. The dying man's wife and children round his bed with gloomy looks —all that festering decay and hypocrisy sickened me. Ah, kisses for lepers—that's not for me, I promise you. And what is the use of such visits to the sick? They are deeds of pity, true, and all very well in painting or in Luca della Robbia's sculpture. But in real life it's another thing. When a man is suffering, he wants to see nobody. It is far better not to be seen. I admit the doctor, the nurse, and the attendant; but others are a nuisance. They are either ghouls or hypocrites. One of the qualities that I prize most in my friends and intimates is health and gaiety. The other day M—— brought me his young wife. Or rather, he sent her to me with a suggestion for an illustration. She came, obediently, at the witching hour: he wants a preface from me, you see. Well, he won't get it. I was cased in virtue. The messenger was young, attractive, resigned to everything: but, what a complexion! As white as a winding-sheet! Not a drop of blood under her skin—a sort of *Dame aux Camelias!* In that I am completely unromantic; no consumptive loves for me! Yes,

people say that suffering ennobles. There is a whole literature about it. Suffering disfigures, my friend, and we should flee from it.

"Now you are sympathetic to me. You have quick, lively wits, and much knowledge. You are freed. But your health has no small part in my feeling towards you. Up to now you have seemed to be solidly built. I trust your little weakness this morning will not occur again."

"I trust so too. But it does not depend on me. And if it did occur again?"

"Ah! Then I should be much less fond of you!"

"And if I were suddenly struck with paralysis?"

"Then don't count any more on me! I should have the charity to spare you my visits and my comparisons. For if I did come I should say: 'I knew a young man from Languedoc full of life and liveliness. But this miserable torpid creature before me, this trembling, shaking, twitching thing——!' I am a faithful friend and I cry: 'This is not Brousson! This is not Brousson! Take away this horror!'"

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THE CRUELLEST OF THE GODDESSES

"She is a woman without pity, hard towards herself and hard towards others. We must have compassion on her. She is a prey to the most cruel of the divinities: to Chastity."

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PRIMUS, SECUNDUS, TERTIA

"People have made the erudition of my characters a subject of reproach. I have been told: 'To whatever century they belong and whatever is their condition, be it Thais or Crainquebille, they all talk in the same way—the way of Renan, of Voltaire, and of yourself.' I answer: 'It is the classical tradition. All Corneille's characters are of Corneille, all Racine's of Racine. Phèdre speaks like Joas, Perrin, Dandin, and Petit Jean. Remember Gil Blas' muleteers: while rubbing down their mules they quote Tacitus. The criticism goes beyond me. It strikes above my head at the most illustrious French writers.

"I have also been reproached with my lack of imagination. Imagination is the mother of extravagance, mere fancy. I should like to be allowed to write novels whose characters were pure abstractions. They should be called, according to the example of jurists: Primus, Secundus, Tertia, Quarta.

"As regards syntax the song writer, Béranger, is far superior to Victor Hugo. His language is much purer, clearer, and more French. It is still the good style of the eighteenth century. I will only say this to you, and tell it in your ear, for if it were known I should catch it hot: 'I prefer Béranger's songs to Victor Hugo's odes.'"

* * * * *

VAIN CHARITY

He lets fly at the female prigs who come to beg for autographed copies of his books for ostensibly philanthropic societies.

"This morning Josephine let in a gawky, vain, clamorous crone, as ugly as sin and tricked out like the Fairy Carabosse. She had the effrontery to come into my room without knocking and thrust some book or other of mine into my face like a pistol, simpering: 'Dear Master! Dear Master! Please write a dedication, a tiny dedication but oh, so witty, like everything you do. It is for a raffle.'

"I said:

"'I have neither pen nor ink.'

"But the she-ape had a stylograph. Then I wrote cynically on the fly-leaf:

"'To Madame X——, philanthropist. Gifts to one's fellows, without the gift of oneself, are nothing.'"

* * * * *

AS STUPID AS A POET

He is in the habit of saying: "As stupid as a poet." I ask him: "But who is your poet? Virgil?"

"Oh, no!"

"Boileau? Racine?"

"The poet of my phrase is Corneille, or Victor Hugo. But Lecomte de l'Isle was far more the poet even than those. Ah, if you had but known him! He really was past praying for. As insolent as a negro, and as ignorant as a carp. The

charlatan! He had the impudence to translate Homer without knowing a word of Greek!"

* * * * *

PRIZE LISTS AND ARMORIAL FAMILIES

It has been said in print that Anatole France was the nephew of Monsignor Thibault, Bishop of Montpellier, and owed his education, like so many others, to the generosity of the Church. That prelate, it is suggested, obtained a scholarship for his nephew at Stanislas.

"I never heard the bishop's name mentioned. If we had been related to him my father would undoubtedly have trumpeted it forth. How should these gentry have given a scholarship to a child who gave such frail promise? My professors expected nothing from me. I should have liked to figure on the prize list: but I never did. I knew it beforehand. At Stanislas in my time—I hope it is no longer so to-day—that achievement was the triumph of favouritism. It was that which revealed to me, child as I was, the iniquity of society and the inequality of human conditions."

"Like Jean Jacques."

"Don't mock! The principal object of our masters in the distribution of distinctions was to give a good reputation to the place and to prove by the sonority of the names that it was a veritable nursery of the aristocracy. Every squireling was certain of hearing his name read out four or five times. The prize list was a regular book of armorial families. And what names! Marie Hector Dieu-

donné Valrand de la Valrandière, six prizes! Yves Guerinec du Marsey, eleven prizes! In short, all the great-nephews of M. de Pourceaugnac and the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas."

"But Thibault is the name of a French noble family, and a fine one too: Thibault de Champagne."

"Little Thibault was without honour."

"He has avenged himself since. You were crowned by the Académie Française before becoming a member of it."

"Yes, for *Sylvestre Bonnard,* my most insipid novel."

"Oh! It is a masterpiece."

"If you like. But a masterpiece of banality. But let us go back from *Sylvestre Bonnard* to my school. A few second-rate honours in the jousting were indeed thrown to the Third Estate, sons of doctors or notaries or lawyers—prizes for recitation, drawing, or religious knowledge: but favouritism played its part even there, in the distribution of the crumbs that fell from the high table."

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THE TRIUMPH OF THE OBESE

"It is a strange thing, but these prizes went generally to fat, chubby, jovial little boys—to those distinguished not by sweet temper or liveliness of wit, but by their rosy cheeks and placidly emphatic contours. There was a little blonde chap, whose curly hair, like St. John and his lamb, and wide

open eyes went straight to the master's heart and took possession there. He carried off all the prizes left by the aristocracy tilting at the ring. What is sure is that I never won the honours of the prize-list or the favour of my masters. Yet in those days I was athirst for fame.

"Prize giving day was to me a day of shame. *Dies iræ, dies illa.* Day of wrath, day of dread. What terror and what alarm! The thought of it still gives me the goose-skin. First of all there was the speech to get through: the indispensable parallel between the stoic Corneille and the tender Racine, the struggle between passion and duty. Thanks to the excellent Stanislas education we would triumph over passion and mount on its corpse. We would all be new Polyeuctes, exemplary Christians, embryo electors of worth and model taxpayers."

Here M. Bergeret delights in imitating the orator. In a voice of ludicrous gravity he declaims the peroration:

"'Children! Young people! Enjoy the judicious leisure of the holidays. Repose is lawful. God Himself rested on the seventh day. Admire Nature. But when in August the horizon suddenly becomes black and thunderstorms hold you captive at home, then open the parental bookcase. Read Seneca! Devour Bourdaloue! Relish Pascal! Bathe in Masillon!'

"We sucked our thumbs and listened. I always returned to the parental roof empty-handed

save for a copy of the prize list and of the speech. My good father welcomed me coldly. But my mother consoled me. It was her merit never to despair of her child.

"Almost every month my professors would come to the house and discourage my parents. In their view the latter's expenditure on me was useless. As well throw their money into the river! I should never do anything worth while. Much best put me straight into trade. Away with books! All I was good for was to tie up parcels and deliver goods. My mother wept fountains of tears. My father was deeply chagrined. And yet, I can say it to-day without fear, there was no child more studious than I. I passed for being slow and lazy. The fact is that my mind was always working. I was never inactive for a minute. I read all the books in the shop—good, bad, pious, profane. It was real suffering to me to be dragged out of my contemplative life. I was extremely awkward and shy. When people put questions to me—for the matter of that, it's the same to-day—all sorts of contradictory ideas hurried into my mind. I tried to force myself to clarify my confused wits. My mistake was in letting my masters see this laborious process. Through having too many ideas, I seemed to have none. If I had been cunning, I should have answered anything, straightway and without correcting myself. An excellent recipe for second, as well as first, childhood. I should have been taken for an infant prodigy. It would have

seemed that an angel had descended from heaven on purpose to breathe inspiration into me. But my beginnings, I recognize to-day, were sincere and candid. At my first words people burst into laughter, which hardly encouraged me to go on. I felt in my heart that I was right and I shut myself up in dumb pride. Result: I passed for a hopeless little duffer.

"Some time before the *baccalauréat,*[1] these gentry persuaded my father that I should fail in the examination unless I went as a boarder. Happily my excellent mother objected. Thanks to her I only tasted half of the ghastly joys of the boarding-school, and I have preserved a horror of that. I used to lunch at school; but I hardly ate anything. The stable-like odour of the refectory sickened me. The food seemed to me atrocious. Was it really? At home the fare was simple and delicious: eggs, but perfectly selected and not smelling of straw: cutlets, but without a smell of grease; the freshest butter and vegetables and fruit; lively Anjou wine, smiling in its bottle—all served on a clean cloth in dishes of cheerful pottery. As a cook my mother achieved the sublimity of simplicity."

"The son practises, in literature, his mother's method."

"Flatterer! Then judge of the contrast. Imagine the small boy, an only child, tended till then as neatly as a young lady, seated at a black marble

[1] The examination at the close of the *études secondaires.*—J. P.

table scratched with the names of his predecessors. It looked like the slab off a tombstone. The plates were rough and greasy. The spoons and forks were never properly washed. And the battered mug, at the bottom of which the 'wash' of wine and water deposited a horrid violet chalk! To the coarseness of the fare, add the commonness of the servants who stuck their disgusting thumbs into the gravy. During the meal a pupil droned out some devotional book: Rollin's *The Lives of the Saints* for instance. Only what is eaten with pleasure is well digested. My belief is that this pious stuff, swallowed with the messes given us, contributed not a little to make me a sceptic. I have never forgiven those evil-speaking masters who tried to make a father discontented with his son."

Here the mocking voice of M. Bergeret becomes harsh:

"A little while after my election to the Academy, as I was crossing the Place du Théâtre Français, an ancient ecclesiastic came towards me with hands out stretched. 'Let me congratulate you, my dear child,' said he with a quivering voice, and made as though to embrace me. I flung him off violently. I recognized in him the master who had judged me fit, in my fresh childhood, for nothing but menial occupations. I could not restrain myself from crying to him: 'You are a scoundrel!'"

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THE EPILEPTIC PUPIL

"Doubtless my masters were lacking in perspicacity. Between ourselves they had to do with a somewhat specious youngster. I early made the discovery that virtue is not recompensed because it is virtue, nor vice punished because it is vice. Rewards and chastisements fly about us at school and in the world, like hail in March. At Stanislas my umbrella was to be phlegmatic. I cared nothing for my masters, as they cared nothing for me. Towards my tenth year I was sitting in class with the Third Estate, equally distant from the bench of honour near the stove, where the hopes of the school blossomed and the Mountain, to which cankerous, Jacobin spirits were relegated.

"I sat at the end of the form. My neighbour was a little chap who was as lively as a mouse and made faces like a monkey. One day he gave me a push with his ruler. My satchel fell to the ground with an appalling noise. As I bent to pick it up, I heard the wind of wrath whistle about my innocent head. 'Anatole Thibault, you will be kept in on Thursday.' Suddenly an illumination came to me. I saw that my salvation lay in aggravating the catastrophe and that I must go to the limit in making a row. Instead of picking up my satchel, I flung inkpot and pen-box and ruler and books to the ground—and fell after them myself, and lay senseless in a pool of ink. Every one rushed to my assistance. Windows were thrown open. My hands were slapped. 'How pale he is!' they

said. 'He looks dreadfully queer!' The object of reprobation became an object of interest. 'Take him to the infirmary.' And I was taken there, and given a small glass of cordial. And then I was taken home by one of the bigger boys with a letter to my parents recommending that I should be made to rest for some time. From that day onwards, no more punishments. I might do anything. I was supposed to have a tendency to epilepsy."

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THE PLEASURE OF SUFFERING

"I had come to a sitting of the Dictionary Committee. It was as cold as ice. We were grouped in front of the fire. Enter Bourget, muffled up in furs. Bourget was never exactly a sportive figure: in his astrakhan, he looked depressed and spiritless.

"'What's the matter, Bourget? You look ill.'

"'No, I am well enough, thank God. But I have just come from X——'s death-bed. It was terrible. He suffered like a man broken on the wheel. Never have I seen so painful an end. The soul could hardly leave his body. What a struggle! Yet, so much the better for him.'

"'What! So much the better for him?'

"'Yes, for his soul. His life, you know, was not exemplary. He often yielded to the call of the flesh and the heat of the blood. But God has sent him the great grace of a terrible end. He could see himself dying! He had time to repent.

Perhaps you will hardly believe me, but I envy that horrible death!'

"On this M. Bourget insinuated himself into the ring of the fire-worshippers. Holding out his feet towards the flame, he held forth to us on the beauty of suffering. A perfect homily on the sweetness of affliction, with quotations from St. Theresa: 'To suffer or to die,' etc.

"I could contain myself no longer. In the middle of his Stoic dissertation I stopped him with a touch on the shoulder.

"'Bourget,' said I, 'take care: you are celebrating the joys of suffering with such fire that you haven't noticed that your soles are burning.'"

* * * * *

DID RENÉ SAVE THE CATHEDRALS?

"After all, the Viscount's conversation was not without profit. His mother's death was useful for something. If René did not save his soul, he saved several Gothic churches. The vandalism of the Revolution has been much exaggerated. It is a tradition. A people that changes its government is like a lot of schoolboys on the eve of the holidays: it breaks everything. The Jacobins broke a great deal. They even overthrew the tombs of our kings. They did just what the Huguenots did. There is in Montluc a most edifying account of a Protestant vandal. Perching himself on the porch of a church, he proceeded to smash the statues of the saints. With hammer

strokes he decapitated virgins, slender and willowy as lilies. In the space of a second he joyously destroyed what ages had venerated and adored. From below a captain called out to him: 'Come down! That's enough.' And to intimidate him, took aim with his arquebus. But the brute implored: 'Just one more!'

"The revolutionary destruction was small compared to that of the Gallicans and the Jansenists under the old régime. Those pious folk rivalled the Huguenots. They had a horror of the Gothic. For them the word was synonymous with barbarian. It was because she seemed to them too Gothic that Joan of Arc was very little honoured in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth she seemed so ridiculous with her maidenhood that Voltaire burlesqued her in verse and no one was scandalized.

"In his *Characters* La Bruyère remarks: 'The Gothic has been entirely abandoned in palaces and churches.' Not only under Louis XIV was the national Gothic style repudiated, but our most national sanctuaries were dressed up in the classic mode. Look at the façades of so many churches: St. Gervais, for example. In those days our old breviaries were bereft of their legends, and more or less Virgilian poems were substituted for mediæval prose. The drunken Santeuil rhymed alternately hymns for St. Benignus, Bossuet's patron, and the epitaph to the adored lap-dog of some princess or other who had died of indigestion from eating too much blancmange—the dog, I mean, not

the princess. It was the age when the canons of Chartres made holes in the glorious stained glass in their cathedrals, so as to read service more easily. This lasted till the Revolution, without which all our French churches would have been rebuilt in the Jesuit style.

"The most characteristic example of this royal vandalism was the debasement of St. Médard, towards the end of the eighteenth century. Petit-Radel, an architect enamoured of cyclopean constructions, had the pleasing idea of refashioning the Gothic pillars of the choir in the shape of the columns of Paestum. You may find in the catalogue of the Salon of the year VIII a drawing by this same Petit-Radel with the appalling title: 'Destruction of a Gothic church by means of fire in less than ten minutes.'

"By his *Génie du Christianisme* Chateaubriand doubtless saved some of our most precious Gothic sanctuaries. That is his finest title to fame. As for the Concordat, no, my friend. 'Hands off, Viscount! That was neither your doing, nor Napoleon's, but Robespierre's. Yes, Robespierre with his feast of the Supreme Being!' At the bottom the Incorruptible had the ecclesiastical temperament. At the age of fifteen, I think, or twenty, he won the prize in a competition at Arras with a poem on the Blessed Virgin. A little later he won another prize with a speech on the abolition of the death penalty. The day when Maxmilian went in his light blue suit, with flowers and ears of corn

in his arms, to burn the statue of atheism at the Tuileries, the priests must have rubbed their hands. 'God be praised,' they sighed, 'we have got processions again. The Supreme Being has set the door ajar for Jesus and Mary. There will yet be fine times for us.'"

"Where did the Viscount get his taste for the Gothic? From Combourg? Maybe. From England? Beyond doubt. When he emigrated there, that dark novel *Anne Radcliffe*[1] was all the rage, with its crumbling towers, vaults by moonlight, and dungeons full of groans. Voltaire had already acclimatized Shakespeare among us—'the St. Christopher of literature' as he called him. Hamlet's ghost haunted our theatres. But it was, after all, a polite ghost, a very gallant French ghost. There was a marked taste for English gardens abounding in romantic ruins. The Italians had given us grottoes and flower-beds adorned with statues. But Louis XIV would assuredly never have had the idea of putting up the skeleton of a chapel in the park of Versailles. Temples and colonnades were all very well. There had indeed been several painters of ruins in the manner of Salvator Rosa. There had also been Callot in the seventeenth century. He often puts in a Gothic ruin as background in his *tentations*. But his satanic surroundings are only to accentuate the

[1] Anatole France, or M. Brousson, appears to have mistaken the name of Mrs. Radcliffe, authoress of *The Mysteries of Udolfo,* for that of one of her novels.—J. P.

horror of the scene. From the garden ruins leaped to the theatre. When restrictions and rules fell with the Bastille and actors could play what they wished without control, it was religious plays that they chose, on account of the scenery and the costumes. The freedom of the stage began with nuns, monks, and priests. There was a general hunt for chasubles and surplices and St. Francis' cords. The churches were shut, but vespers were sung on the boards. To attract the public you had to have a cardinal, or at least a stole.

"Before the *Génie du Christianisme* the theatre realized the picturesque opportunities offered by the atmosphere, the costumes, and the furniture of religion."

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MÉLANIE'S SAUCE

"I lack the facile pen. Formerly I had it even less. I was born with a conscience. If I write three words, I erase two. Once, however, I did write an article straight off the reel. But there is a God who cares for drunkards, and I was somewhat 'the worse for liquor'[1] to use the picturesque expression of simple folk. It happened without my knowing. At table I finished the little decanter of white wine. It was very hot. I thought the wine had a remarkable taste, but I dared say nothing. There are so many kinds of wine in France! But when I got up, I thought I should really tumble. My head was clear but

[1] Fr. "Un peu bu."

my legs were like lead. People say ordinarily that wine goes to the head. That is a great error. It goes to the feet. It enchains them. Do you know what was in the little decanter? A mistake had been made in the bottle: it was brandy! I had drained my glass full. And it was the day of my article.[2] The worst part was getting upstairs. Once before the paper, my pen ran of itself. But where did it run? I only knew the next day. When I went to the office, the door-keeper said to me: 'M. Hébrard wants to see you.' My flesh went cold. 'It's the brandy,' thought I; 'my article. He has seen it. What'll happen to me?' Hébrard rushed to me with open arms. He embraced me. He called me 'his dear France.' He showered compliments on me. 'And I thought,' he said, 'that you had no facility! I never suspected such fire in you! You ought to do political stuff! I am simply enchanted to have you as a collaborator. I have given instructions to the cashier: your salary is raised.'

"My adventure is the same as that of Mélanie, the noted cook. Mélanie, I think, was born in Brittany and for a long time she merely vegetated. Nobody ever said anything about her cooking. It was ordinary: wholly without imagination or sensibility. Just cooking. One day at the butcher's —with whose lad she was on bad terms, having refused his advances—she was stuck with a piece of more than doubtful meat. It was as high as a

[2] For the *Temps*.—J. P.

hare or a snipe. But what is good for snipe and hare is not good for beef. What was to be done? In terror of being dismissed, Mélanie invents a marvellous sauce. She showers condiments and mid-summer herbs into it. She sprinkles the carrion with Madeira and with brandy. Finally, trembling, she takes in the dish and goes off anxiously to the kitchen. She is recalled with tumult: 'Mélanie! Mélanie!' 'There we are,' exclaims the poor girl, 'they've smelt it. I shall have to pack my trunk.' So, untying her apron, she appears before her judges. 'Ah, Mélanie!' says her master. 'You're a cunning one! Why did you hide your talents? If you only wanted, you would make all the greatest chefs green with envy. You have given us a dish fit for an archbishop. I double your wages. Always order the same piece of meat, from the same butcher, and serve it in the same way.' "

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THE WEASEL OF THE REFRESHMENT ROOM

"When I was twenty, to the horror of my father, I was republican like all the young men of my class. We vaguely felt the breakage ahead. We sought means of ingratiating ourselves with the coming régime. A lawyer, just beginning, would play for a condemnation and a touch of prison. A political case would set him on his feet. At that time I was inditing the *Imprécations de Varrus* for the *Gazette Rimée*. Poor *Gazette,* they did for it! We attended the lectures of M. Beulé with enthu-

siasm. Under colour of relating the history of Tiberius or Germanicus, he attacked the liberal Empire. Nero, Tiberius, and Caligula were Napoleon III; Poppæa and Messalina, the Empress Eugénie. The orgies of Capri the Maison Dorée and the parties at Compiègne and Fontainebleau where they used to act Octave Feuillet's charades.

"You can imagine the applause he got. The least allusion was taken with feverish avidity. Beulé then seemed some one. But after the fall of the Empire, people realized that he was very small beer. There are men like that. In the dust of a riot they look like statues. At ordinary times they are scarecrows made of old frock-coats stuffed with straw. I met M. Beulé going about afterwards in society. He had taken a Mme. Beulé to him and dragged her round. She was hideous and gifted with an inordinate appetite: thence she was nicknamed 'the weasel of the refreshment room.'"

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A PLAY FOR RÉJANE

"What would you say if, as a change from all this dark, fanatical fifteenth century erudition, we did a play? Réjane is extremely keen that I should do something for her. I am much attached to her. She is a good woman, bright, simple, engaging, and away from the footlights nothing stagey about her. But she is a bit overblown, as the saying is. Women should have charms, but not in such overwhelming

degree. The other day I sat beside her at lunch at Mme. X——'s. She looked like an eiderdown corded up. What sort of part could one write for such a plump body as she is? On the stage, I know, her mountainous curves appear no more than generous. All the same it's difficult to make her play sweet young misses. You'll enjoy working for the stage? I should just about think so! Well, we will. Now I have no sense of drama. The stage, to my mind, is an inferior art. That is why it meets the popular taste. To succeed in it you must have a thick skin and a commercial mind, and above all no literary prejudices. The tiresome part is constructing the play. That is where I count on you. Do you know how de X—— and G—— manufacture their fooleries? Nothing more lamentable could be imagined. Our two merry spirits have each in his pocket a note-book. And, as soon as anything amusing is said in conversation, out comes the note-book and down in it goes the witticism, the joke, the idea for a scene. They are workers in mosaic. People find them natural and sparkling. Myself, I have never seen such a laborious sparkle. We shall not work like that. I have a subject for our jolly fat friend. The Duchesse de Berri. It will fit her to a T. Oh, I know it's not an original subject. The royal 'relic-gobbler and rope-dancer,' as the Vicomte de Chateaubriand so devoutly says, has often been put on the stage. But the dramatists have been tempted by the sentimental side of the Vendéan conspiracy. They have made the

Duchesse de Berri a martyr to the legitimist cause and to maternal love. Like Jesus, she is betrayed by a Jew: Deutz is Judas. And out with the slab of the mantelpiece and M. Thiers' tongs![1] No, no. The Duchesse de Berri is the subject not for a tragedy, but for a comedy—a heroic comedy, if you will. She is a widow with plenty of temperament. She is an Italian, a Neapolitan. She has Vesuvius in her blood. Now nothing is so circumscribed as the court of an exiled prince. They have nothing to do but tease one another, watch one another, and redouble all their ceremonies. In short the duchess who in Paris could easily find a remedy for her—her internal fits of suffocation, as Beroald de Verville says, lacked doctors far off in the country. Perhaps too the doctors there were not very skilful. And perhaps she wanted a change of doctors. Add a touch of romance, Walter Scott, the springtime, and we are on the track of the child of the Vendée. The fun will be to show all the dynasty, the legitimists, the partisans of the July monarchy, hanging on the—the—you can supply the word yourself—of a hysterical princess. Chateaubriand, of course, as always, was sublime over the whole business—sublimely ridiculous. 'Madame, your son is my king!' shouted the viscount. 'Your son!' That great booby

[1] The Duchesse de Berri concealed herself in a priest hole behind the fireplace. She was betrayed by Deutz, and Thiers in paying him his price is said to have handed the banknotes with a pair of tongs, so as to avoid the touch of the traitor's hand.—J. P.

of a René was unaware that the good duchess was just about to present Henri Dieudonné with another brother, sprung from no one knows where. This miraculous child ought really to be nicknamed 'Diabledonné.' There is your play—the child's birth. It is a legitimist burlesque. Marie Caroline is at the Château de Blaye. King Louis Philippe is watching over his dear niece like the apple of his eye. He wants to profit by the windfall. He won't let the flighty princess escape from the rat-trap till her confinement is over and the delivery taken place. The delivery! Just think. It is necessary that the royal dishonour should be so well attested that nobody can raise a doubt about it. Don't you see the play? All the ministerial menials are agog. If only Marie Caroline doesn't have her baby clandestinely! The poor giddy thing is surrounded by spies disguised as doctors and midwives. The part played by General Bugeaud was really not very elegant. The future hero of Algeria spent night after night by the princess's closet, watching and spying, ready, gallant fellow, to dash to the place should he hear an unwonted noise in the night, and carry off the stillborn body. What a trophy for a general! And all the time the poor woman coming nearer and nearer to her time hunts, by means of faithful friends, through the needy little Courts of Europe, for a husband complacent enough to give his name to the expected child.

"Evidently all that will be difficult to put on

the stage. We must proceed like the classics. The delivery, like Camille's death, would take place off stage. We should hear the cries of the mother, the infant's wails. We should see servants and midwives, those priestesses of Lucina, carrying basins and cloths. I must find a plot to hang it on. But you have a vivid imagination. That part I put into your hands. It might be a young legitimist, desperately classic but imaginatively romantic, who undertakes to free the captive princess. He believes her as pure and white as a lily. After numerous alarums and excursions he manages to get into the tower of Blaye, at the very moment, of course, of the confinement. In a twinkling he would desert de Maistre and de Bonald for Victor Hugo. That's all very confused, but it would delight Réjane. *Madame Sans-Gêne* will be enchanted at being a real duchess. I can see her very well in the part of a woman who is enceinte: she won't need much make-up.

"You will see how entertaining the rehearsals will be. I immensely enjoy going behind the scenes. It takes years off my age. There are always a number of charming little women among the walking-on ladies. We must have a scenario ready for Réjane without delay."

A month later I bring him the scenario of the *Duchesse de Berri*. He puts it in a drawer without so much as looking at it.

"We must not think any more of our duchess," he says in a disappointed voice. "Madame won't

hear of it. She is persuaded that I should cover myself with ridicule. I know nothing about the theatre, she says. When I spoke of my promise to Réjane, she retorted: 'You are an incorrigible libertine. All you want is to hang about the green-room.'"

For a moment he remains silent, stroking his beard and chewing the hairs in it. He concludes:

"Between ourselves, Madame is not without insight."

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IN PRAISE OF ST. LOUIS

"It is difficult for us after so many revolutions to imagine what the king meant to our ancestors. We have seen so many of them driving in the same landau as the President of the Republic! We have had every opportunity to realize that they were men like ourselves. In the Middle Ages and even in the seventeenth century it was otherwise. The king represented God. He held his crown directly from Him. He was above mortal blemishes. When the Abbé de Choisy was writing his *History of Charles VI,* the Duke of Burgundy maliciously asked him: 'How are you going to get round saying that the King was mad?' The abbé, who even in that time was a Voltaïrian and had many modern ideas, was quite disconcerted. Then he answered bravely: 'I shall say that he was mad! Virtue alone differentiates men when they are dead.' His hardihood astonished, not only his contemporaries, but himself. It was indeed a pres-

age of the decline of the religion of royalty, which was then at its height.

"Now that we are alone I don't mind telling you: it was not Joan of Arc who saved France! It was St. Louis. If I put that in my book, I should be assailed on all sides: both parties, the fanatics and the liberals, would hoot me. And when they set out to be fanatical, no one is so fanatical as the liberals! Yet, it is the pure truth. It was not the Maid who saved France in 1430, but blessed St. Louis. That is the miracle of the monarchy.

"The people had kept in their hearts the memory of the King who graciously dispensed justice under the oak of Vincennes. He still reigned in heaven, where the English, on their side, had no monarch. Of course they had St. George, but we had St. Michael. We had for us Madam Mary, who was all-powerful over the heart of a son of noble disposition. France was the Holy Virgin's land of predilection. She would constantly leave Paradise to stroll among its woods and lonely dells. She put spells on combe and spring. Would she leave this kingdom of lilies, where she had so many sanctuaries, to perish? Next to her the strongest defender of the French in the court of heaven was the blessed king who died on the Crusade. His halo still lingered on the degenerate heads of his descendants. Humble folk, who knew nothing of feudal geography, the peasants, the poor, the artisans in the towns, imagined that it was better to live in the land of France than else-

where, and that work there was lighter and justice more true. On the evening of Joan of Arc's triumphal entry into Orleans a churchman in the Cathedral of Sainte-Croix gave voice to this unanimous feeling. In anguished tones he asked the Maid: 'Ah, sweet lady, must we become English?'"

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IN PRAISE OF ROYALTY

"That question is decisive. It pierces the obscurity of those enigmatic times like a ray of light. It lets us see the hearts of our ancestors. They did not want to be English! Consider that they did not know where England was, nor what England was. Doubtless the 'Goddams' were cruel in war. Were they more so than the Burgundians, the Armagnacs, the robbers, the pillagers, the freebooters, who ground down the poor people, ransomed towns, profaned monasteries, and burned the crops? The English were said to be tailed: yes, they had hirsute appendages, but that adornment would not have terrified anybody, not even the ladies. No: they didn't want to be English, because they wanted to remain French. Born in the garden of lilies, they detested the leopard. France was the best of countries because it had the best masters, the most just, the mildest kings. To catch this popular affection, you must read Joinville. The unhappy Charles VII inherited all the love and loyalty that had been stored up in the course of ages in the soul of the people. Let it be proved that he was descended from St. Louis, and the English were

beaten! His worst enemy was the ill fame of Isabeau of Bavaria. Jeanne entered wholly into this national conspiracy. At her first interview with the Dauphin Charles of Chinon she declared: 'You are the true heir of France and the King's son. I have been sent to conduct you to Reims, there to be crowned according to the holy and noble rite.' People have been astonished—myself among them—at this singular mission. What! France is at her death-rattle. The King is but a kinglet. The fairest provinces, the capital itself, are in the hands of the English or the Burgundians. And instead of marching on Paris, after the relief of Orleans, they go off to Reims to take part in a religious ceremony, and waste their time in processions!

"The important thing, you see, was that the King should be crowned and anointed with the miraculously inexhaustible oil from the Holy Phial. This oil which came from heaven could not drop on to the head of a bastard. If the rite of the French church was accomplished, it would mean that Charles VII was indeed the son and heir of Charles VI, the Mad."

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THE KING AND THE SHEPHERDESSES

"The House of France beyond doubt owed this prodigious popularity to its bravery and political sense. Most of all it owed it to familiar intercourse with simple folk. See with what ease a little ecstatic shepherdess accompanied by two

obscure adventurers reaches the King himself, and that in time of war! Imagine a shepherdess impatient to reveal to our President of the Republic what the angels had revealed to her about France while she watched her flock. Our shepherd girl would go first to her priest, who would treat her as a lunatic. She is from Auvergne, Anjou, Berry —it's all one. Driven on by the celestial voices, she goes on foot to the prefecture. She won't even see the prefect! Do you know what would be the lot of Joan of Arc to-day? Prison or the madhouse!"

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"ROYAL."

"A great quality in the House of France was its sweet complacence. What virtue there was in the word 'King'! A man who suffered some wrong would murmur: 'Ah, if the King knew about it!' The ill came from the King's not knowing. He had bad information, or he had evil counsellors, or he was too young, or too old. He was a man to be pitied. The epithet 'royal' was given to the best things. Choice herbs—corn-salad, for instance—were in common parlance 'royal.' A specially fine format was called 'royal paper'; a beautiful poem 'a royal song.' Our republican mouths still say 'beef *à la royale*' and 'hare *à la royale*.' And that merry phrase: 'a dish fit for a king!'

"'Ah, Colette is a morsel fit for a king!'

"The king must not be a man of evil life. On

the contrary he set an example to the nation. It was a claim on people's gratitude that he chose his mistresses well. In that every one had honour, and some profit. In his place every one else would have done the same. And then the King must have some relaxation in his difficult profession. When the bow is always bent, you know——! And the King always took thought for his people. He thought of them by day, he thought of them by night. It was of his people that he discoursed at table with his great men. There were no bad kings. There were unhappy kings: unhappy for the chastisement of their sins and of our sins. But heaven's heart would soften, for the kingdom of France was the keystone of Christendom. St. Gregory the pope bore witness that the crown of France surpassed all other crowns, just as the royal dignity surpassed the state of private individuals.

"This happy popularity of our kings came also from their ability. In quarrels between the different classes they tried to be arbitrators, moderators, or managers. I use that somewhat trivial word on purpose. Our best kings literally managed France as a farmer his farm. He extracts out of it all he can, but he is careful not to exhaust the soil or to deplete the cattle. In bad years the farmer does not hesitate to sell a field or a piece of vineyard to conserve the rest. Just so our kings would cede a province after a defeat or as a daughter's dowry. The dogma of the integrity of French soil about which so much criminal ink has been

spilt since 1870, this last of all dogmas, was not yet born. Wherever the king was, there was the country."

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THE LADYBIRD IN THE ENGRAVINGS

The world is to him a vast museum. He professes the most complete indifference for mountains, rivers, and other geographical phenomena. "They are warts," he says. When some one speaks to him of a beautiful view, he retorts: "Don't let your imagination run away with you: it is only earth, water, and clouds."

He asks a visitor: "From what part of the country are you?"

"From Lyons."

"Ah, from Lyons. Happy man! What a beautiful town. I have delightful memories of your St. Jean."

And he sets off through the catalogue of the museum. He is an infallible guide. Not a single picture escapes him. His visual memory is extraordinary, but only for artistic things. Nor does he forget the names of antique dealers and booksellers. But in vain will the gentleman from Lyons try to bring him to the slopes of la Guillotière or to Fourvières. "At what hotel did he stop?" He does not know: it was in a great square with railings, a sort of Place de la Concorde without any statues. "Did he like the food? Lyons is proud of its table. There is a particular inn where the crayfish are marvellous." He is astonished that

anyone should take note of such paltry details. Does the name of a cook-shop, however excellent, deserve to find room in the brain of a learned man? There is so little room in our brains! The historical side alone interests him. Thus he made a pilgrimage to Golfe Juan to see the place where Napoleon landed. But he did not notice the Iles Sainte Marguerite, nor Antibes with its outline like a Vernet. Amid the olives near the shore, he only found a well-stored library of books on the Hundred Days. If a landscape is not engraved, painted or printed, it has no significance for him.

He knows Nîmes, my native town, thoroughly; but it is Nîmes in its Gallo-Roman aspect. We have in our mediocre museum, he tells me, a little picture by Prud'hon which no one ever speaks of but is worth the journey there. We have also in the Maison Carrée the torso of a dancing-girl which in his opinion is equal to the most voluptuous sculptures of the Greeks.

Anatole France's artistic memory is a shade tyrannical. Thus he describes with tortured minuteness one of "God's little creatures," whom he touchingly has kept in his memory.

"She was divine, my friend! She had that faun-like air of the portrait of Mme. Mayer by Prud'hon; the breast a little falling and sloping away like the Comtesse Régnault de Saint-Jean d'Angely by Gérard. But the daintiest morsel of all—ah, that was a morsel fit for a king!—was the

back, so ripe, so rounded, so full of adorable dimples like an autumn fruit—the back of Ingres' *Woman bathing!*"

And so on, with the foot, the calf, the ankle, the waist, the hair. The poor little thing seemed literally like a ladybird flattened out in an album of engravings.

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HER AUNT'S PILLOW

"Jumping out of bed in the morning the fairy chirruped to me: 'I must leave you, old dear. My aunt at Asnières is on her death-bed and I must fly to her.'

"So saying, she powdered her little nose and touched up her lips with a professional air. She groaned: 'I'm so unhappy! Auntie's been so good to me. She brought me up. You'ld love her if you knew her, ducky. Oh Lord, I do hope I'll be in time! How do you get to Asnières from here?'

"Torrents of tears the size of chick-peas poured from her eyes as she looked at the time-table. The stream flowed down her powdered cheeks and splashed on the page. I slipped the money into her hand. A smile flitted across the storm, and she kissed me with carmined lips.

"'I'll come and tell you how auntie is, darling.'

"I addressed prayers to heaven for the health of an aunt so accomplished in training nieces to the practice of virtue.

"But perhaps this excellent aunt is a mere figment of imagination! When they have earned their

money, my friend, all these sweet little ones have a sick aunt somewhere, at Vincennes, or at Charenton, or at Issy-les-Moulineaux. They must fly to the pillow of their expiring relative. And they fly off with their hundred franc note, like sparrows with a crumb. These creatures have such touching sensibility!"

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VIRGIL, THE VALET

He is economical in his habits and only commits extravagances over antiques and curios. He is also very tidy. He puts his things away so carefully that he forgets where he has put them. Then he imagines that he has been robbed and abounds in lamentations like those of Harpagon when he has lost his beloved casket.

How often at an antique dealer's or a print-seller's has he not said to me, pointing to a curio or an engraving: "That was stolen from me."

"By whom, Master?"

"By Virgil."

Who can Virgil be? Is it a pseudonym—for he loves giving people nicknames? Is he an invented being, like Putois? He is fond of making up little fables in which he allegorises people and things, and when he is caught red-handed in these make-believes, explains:

"It is a synthesis. It is more true even than the truth."

Virgil, it seems, this Virgil of the pilfering hands, was manservant at the Villa Said long, long

ago, even before Josephine's day. He was a model domestic, quick, attentive, devoted. But he had perverted tastes.

"Between ourselves, his morals were quite indifferent to me. He did but follow his nature. Every one must find his salvation where he can in this wicked world. But he used to collect his companions of an evening from among the lowest creatures and brought them back to the Villa Said. The dickens knows who came there! Virgil may have been as honest as the day, but his guests used to put a trifle or two in their pockets. And there was revelry by night! They drank my wine, they drank my liqueurs! They thumbed my books! They took pickings from my wardrobe! No, these Antinouses cannot have been gentlemen of elevated upbringing. I found éditions de luxe torn and blotched with wine. That, far more than Virgil's little extravagances, deserved to call down on them fire from heaven. After all, Virgil, the great Virgilius Maro, he too, you know, was a devotee of—Hellenism."

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THE ANCESTRAL SIGN

"The other evening I met Jules Soury in the arcade at the Odéon. When I last saw him he was an atheist, a materialist, and an anarchist. At the Collège de France, he used to dissect brains and showed us the puppet wires of our souls or, rather, that the soul did not exist. When I met him again, he had become an ultra-nationalist and neo-

Catholic. He recited his *Credo* to me. He believes not in God, but devoutly in the Virgin Mary and in the saints of France: St. Clothilde, St. Louis, Joan of Arc, Vincent de Paul, etc. He does not believe in the sacraments, but goes every day to Mass and to vespers and respects the breviary. He wants to be buried as a Catholic. He loves the pomp of the Church: it comes, he says, from false gods and therefore must be cherished since it provides a basis for reconciling Olympus, ancient and modern. His religion is tradition. Down with science, and up with legend. 'I have passed my life,' he deplored, 'in destroying the fair flowers of legend. Now in my old age I have a thirst for the legendary, and everything scientific makes me sick. Any pedant,' he went on, 'can do science, but the growth of legends is miraculous. They spring no one knows whence, like a seed dropped by a bird that takes root on the pediment of a temple. Legends! Give me legends! I am athirst for legends!'

"As he recited this strange creed, he took off his bell-shaped top-hat and exposed a skull so bald and so red that it looked as if it had been scalded. He made gigantic signs of the cross. Not the little furtive signs made by school-children who hurry irreverently through the adorable symbol of our salvation with a sketchy jerk of the hand! No: Soury crossed himself as no one has done since the days of the martyrs. His forehead seemed to bear the stigmata of his piety and, regardless of stomach-

ache, he thumped his waistcoat till it resounded like a drum while he declared:

"'I do not believe in God! There is no God. But I love Christ, who loves the Franks. I make the great Catholic sign in public to exorcise the folly of the Republic. Look at those imbeciles laughing! With this sign of ritual and tradition do I scatter incense to counteract the hideousness of the crowd.' And therewith he multiplied his crossings. I pushed him into Flammarion's on pretence of looking at the books, for the urchins were beginning to cry 'Old Guy!'

"Some one told me a good story of Jules Soury the erstwhile heretic, now become one of the pillars of the Church. Of an afternoon he goes to St. Sulpice to adore the Virgin of Bouchardon. One day he was plunged so deeply into meditation that he fell asleep. At six o'clock the sacristan, unable to wake him from his beatific slumber, tugged the sleeper by his sleeve: 'Closing time, sir!' Jules Soury, suddenly brought to earth, rolled his eyes, rubbed them, and inspired by memories of his medical student days, answered: 'Look here, when I'm praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary, you bl—dy well let me alone!'"

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THE RAVAGES OF AGE

"Now confess! You think me an old driveller, though I am only three times your age. Age is a question in which everything is relative. When I

was in the eighth form I was put next a great booby who was twice as old as I was. Perhaps the poor backward fellow had been ill. However, there it was: we were there on the same bench, he fifteen, and I eight. His great bulk terrified me. Sometimes I took a stealthy look at him while he was poring over his lessons. The down on his cheeks, shown up by the light, instead of having the charm of budding grace to me, seemed a horrid defect. 'Poor chap,' I thought sadly, 'the ravages of age have got him already.'"

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AT THE COOK-SHOP

"We must hurry up this morning: we have to lunch at the M——'s at Passy. You are invited too. M—— was so insistent, and I have refused him so often! Madame said: 'You simply must go. You have put it off over and over again.'"

At eleven o'clock we set out on foot from the Villa Said to the Pont Mirabeau. All the way he groans:

"What a bore this lunch is! They are the dreariest people. It's like being in a perpetual fog. M—— is a Huguenot; indeed he's the son of something like the Huguenot pope. His father or his grandfather was a prophet and made copious revelations about the Almighty. Adonai used to have long familiar talks with him every evening, as I do with you. The voice came out of the hanging lamp, I believe. Calvinists always have dreadful

food, a sort of Reformation fare. Thick pieces of boiled beef, with boiled vegetables, and conversation to match. Why must we go there? What an infernal bore! Life is so short! We might go into any one of these little restaurants and have a delicious lunch with an *entrecôte* Bercy and a bit of Brie. The cab-drivers who frequent them are real connoisseurs and have tyrannic appetites after the fresh air. Ah, but I promised Madame to go to the Momiers' !"

We reach the Momiers', and ring the bell. After a long wait a startled manservant appears, hastily hiding his apron and dusting-brush behind his back. He takes us into a gloomy drawing-room and hurriedly opens the windows. No flowers; no pretty things. Covers on the chairs. Pictures done up in newspapers. The chandelier tied up in a muslin bag. For half an hour we kick our heels in a room that reeks of stuffiness. At last the lady of the house appears, having—it is only too evident—dressed in haste, for her hair is badly done. Conversation begins badly and drearily continues. Heavy pauses follow commonplaces about health and the weather. Anatole France looks at the clock, the hands of which have long since marked noon, and breathes anxiously. Where is the feast? No tinkle of table being laid is to be heard; no hissing of viands cooking. What is distinctly audible is the rumbling within the lady of the house herself, whose stomach produces sounds like turtle doves

in May. They receive like answer from the academician's gizzard.

Finally she asks carelessly:

"Will you lunch with us?"

"My dear lady," confesses Anatole France, "that was why we came to Passy. Didn't you invite Brousson and me?"

"Yes, but on Thursday next. We only returned this morning. I am waiting for my husband and when he comes we shall go out to a restaurant. Will you join us? He will be enchanted at your mistake. We shall have the pleasure of your company twice over."

"Oh, no, no! I am overwhelmed. I am the most absent-minded man alive. How infinitely ridiculous of me! To tumble in on you like this and invite ourselves to people who don't expect us! No, no. Good-bye, and all my apologies!"

Once out of the house, he observes:

"It may be ridiculous of us, but much more so of them. What clumsiness! What stinginess! They ask us to lunch and in our zeal we come a week too soon. What is a mistake of a week? I am astonished that I didn't come a week too late! And they have nothing for us to eat. Upon my word it's discouraging. Here is a hostess, with pretensions to be a Parisienne, who is incapable of organizing a little impromptu meal! Hasn't she got the telephone, and menservants, and maids. All she needs is to ring up the cook-shop and the ice-cream man, and send Mariette round to the milkman's.

Cheeseparing, that's what it is; and they are screws. It's a capital thing for us though: we are well out of it. I am delighted most of all on account of Madame: henceforth she will leave me in peace. I imagine what would have happened had such a thing occurred to my good mother, who was a woman of the people. In a twinkling the cloth would have been spread and on it her pretty plates and, as if by magic, a luscious chicken, and salad, and a perfect omelette. But we must repair our error. What do you say to this cook-shop? The lady is a plump little body. Something too ripe in your eyes? Ah, well, that is a question of taste and you know mine. Come, come. Let's go in and eat."

Anatole France has dined like a god off the marble-topped table at the humble wine-shop. His ambrosia was boiled beef with coarse salt and gherkins, sheep's feet in a white sauce, beans, Brie, and custard tart.

"Ah," says he, wiping his moustache with the coarse napkin, "now I feel forty years younger."

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GREAT AND PERFECT

M—— repeats to him, whether out of malice or stupidity, the remark of a critic: "Anatole France is not a great writer: he is a perfect writer."

"This learned gentleman," says the Master, "talks like Balaam's she-ass prophesying, for the truth comes from his mouth while he brays. 'I am a perfect writer.' 'I am not a great writer.'

The dolt! As if 'perfect' and 'great' were not the same thing. What is perfection? It is the combination of every good quality without the admixture of a single defect. If all the good qualities are united in me, what more does he want? He is a perfect imbecile. As if perfection could be measured! Wretched quill-driver — why, he doesn't even know his own language! If I say: 'Racine is a great writer,' I mean, of course, a great writer compared to others, Pradon for example. But, compared to Boileau, Racine is simply a writer. They are both perfect writers. I am enchanted that this booby should do me the favour to put me beside them. I shall write him a line of thanks."

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I HAVE BUT ONE SOUL

"For the type of a good Christian take that of the Duc de B——. He was not one to flinch where religion was in question. Like Abraham or Polyeucte he was ready to sacrifice his wife and children that he might go to heaven. The duchess suffered terribly during her confinements, and her doctor, alarmed at the prospect of another pregnancy, thought it his duty to warn the duke.

"'Your grace,' he said, 'you must refrain from conjugal relations with the duchess. Her life is at stake!'

"The duke looked at him with contempt.

"'Sir,' he said lisping—for he lisped like a baby, 'I am a good Catholic. I would rather lose

my wife than lose my soul. I have but one soul and there are a great many women.'

" Some time afterwards the death of the Duchesse de B—— was announced as the result of complications during her confinement."

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RESPECT ST. PAUL

" Contrary to the general opinion, the religious spirit can go together with all sorts of things that are not at all metaphysical. Take my own case for instance. Suppose I have overeaten in the evening, or eaten something hard to digest or something I am fond of that is not good for me—cod, for example—I suffer in the night metaphysical anguish. In my broken slumber I have ghastly visions of an illusory world. I am seized with the desire to turn to God—and to turn from side to side on my mattress. But a little Vichy water or a few drops of mint alcohol generally dissipate this pious Pascal kind of image and give me back sleep and peace. See how things hold together. A teaspoonful of medicated alcohol or a pinch of bicarbonate of soda and I fall from the sublimities of a Pascal to the quibbles of a Bergeret. 'O Physics, save me from Metaphysics,' said the great Newton.

" One of the least metaphysical of men is assuredly Gordon Bennett. He is the perfect type of Turcaret who only sees the world from the point of view of the stock exchange. Well, when that purely business man's champagne goes ever so

little to his head he begins to hiccup religion and spouts about God like a preaching friar. I can still see him after a big dinner where he had drunk distinctly more than one glass. His face was enflamed. His eyes wept tears of wine, and he went on saying: 'Look here, Monsieur France, just look here. You're a clever man, but I want to tell you something. I'm Gordon Bennett. And I want to tell you that there's something—something up there. Up there, you know!' And he pointed to the chandelier.

"Gordon Bennett's conception of God was very much his own, in fact, peculiarly Protestant. He asked me once for a short story for the illustrated Easter number of the *New York Herald*. I agreed to do one for fifteen hundred francs. He is very open-handed in business, and it was easy money for me. I took the first episode out of the *Pierre Blanche,* of which you are reading the proofs, the story of Gallio and St. Paul, and sent it to the *New York Herald*. That's what is called killing two birds with one stone."

"Recently, however, Gordon Bennett's secretary called upon me and, as he handed me a cheque, said:

"'Mr. Gordon Bennett is delighted with your short story, which he admires immensely. He bade me tell you that you have never done anything so brilliant. He is going to have it printed and gorgeously illustrated, for himself alone. There will be only one copy, that will be the pride of his li-

brary. He is paying you, of course, as if the story were appearing in the *New York Herald*. But he wants to ask you to write another immediately, for which he will also pay fifteen hundred francs, for the paper. And he begs you in this one not to speak ill of St. Paul, because American readers don't like to have ill said of him. Make fun, if you like, of the other apostles, of St. Joseph, of the Virgin Mary, of the popes, of the Pope of all the saints in Paradise: but not a word against St. Paul. We should lose readers.' "

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TYRANNICAL LOVE

" Are you aware that there is something worse than hatred or indifference? That thing is love and the tyranny of it. You complain that your childhood was passed without tenderness, and your youth without advice, encouragement, or applause. You do not know what you are talking about. I had myself the most loving of mothers. She adored her only son, her Anatole, as a creation of her own and her masterpiece. All my good qualities came to me, in her eyes, from her, and my faults, I need hardly say, solely from my father. Poor man! She loved him too, but she despised him more. I was to make up to her for everything that had not come off in their married life. She wanted to see me famous, celebrated, rich, applauded, covered with all the middle-class virtues, in short, the pride of the Quai Malaquais, just as

she would have wished her husband to be. So she loved me for two. That's a lot, my friend: a lot too much! She literally poisoned my life. She bewildered and stupefied me. She made me inconsequent and shy. She kept me so constantly in leading-strings that until my thirtieth year I hesitated to cross the barrier that separates youth from manhood. We were both objects of ridicule. Long after I had a beard, she was treating me like a small boy.

"This best of women was driven by her love to indelicacies that denoted forgetfulness of all modesty. She never asked me or attempted to surprise my confidence, but Vidocq on the track of a criminal was a child beside the subtlety of this excellent and Christian mother in spying out her boy's modest loves. I would find some photograph or other that I had left in the pocket of my greatcoat placed on my mantelpiece, as on an altar. The scraps of torn letters would be exhumed from my waste-paper-basket and laboriously pieced together. And all this accompanied by silent despair, and floods of tears and sighs heavy enough to drive a windmill.

"Till I was thirty-five my mother never went to bed till she had seen me come home. Whether it was midnight, or four in the morning, I would find her, candlestick in hand, waiting in implacable silence. It became a sort of ritual. Gently and silently she put the candle into my hand, kissed

me on both cheeks, and went to bed with sighs and groans, only to begin again the next day."

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THE KING OF ELIXIRS

I have corrected the proofs of the *Pierre Blanche* and bring them back to him.

"How do you like my stone?"

"It is a most precious stone. I envy your art of making striking topical truths spring out of a dead text."

"You would like to be in my shoes? Poor wretch! How you would be punished if God took you at your word! You remind me of that pleasant tale in Brantôme. He was a very old and very learned man, who knew all the secrets of the Grand Art and its universal panacea. He could manufacture the rarest essences, nay, the elixir vitæ itself, and was skilled in the transmutation of metals. He had in his service a youth whose business it was to watch over furnaces and alembics and to crush simples and metals and mummies and bezoar-stones—in short, to do what you do here. And one day the youth, just like you, burst into enthusiasm over his old master's science. He envied him.

"'Ah,' sighed he, 'how I should like to possess, too, the secret of making essences.'"

"Then the old alchemist—he must have been about my age—looked gloomily at the rows of phials round his laboratory.

"'And I,' said he softly, 'I would give all my

secrets, and my liquid gold, and the elixir vitæ, for the essence that is in you, my boy!'"

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MONSIGNOR DE CABRIÈRES AT M. BERGERET'S

"I want you to come a little earlier, please, tomorrow. It is Sunday and Monsignor de Cabrières, who is from your town, has written to say that he will pay me a visit at nine o'clock. The poor bishop is a candidate for the Academy, and insists on making all the traditional visits. It is a needless trouble on his part, for I no longer go to the Academy: I have not voted since the Dreyfus case. But he is a prelate of noble birth, and wishes to observe the customs."

M. Bergeret is really delighted at the bishop's visit, for he adores the society of clerics.

Next morning punctually at nine o'clock an archaic but comfortable coupé, such as are seen in the Faubourg St. Germain, stops before the villa.

"Go to meet the episcopal candidate," commands Anatole France.

There is nothing to indicate the visitor's high ecclesiastical dignity. It is Lent, the time for penitence, and according to the rules for that gloomy liturgical season, Monsignor de Cabrières is dressed all in black. In his poor cassock and shiny cape with worn velvet collar you would take him for a humble country priest. He waits in the hall, emotional and shivering, fingering the tarnished gilt tassels on his hat and looking with a

suspicious eye on his strange surroundings of mediæval virgins and reliquaries cheek by jowl with pagan goddesses. Wrapped up in his poor clerical gown he looks almost like some aged pew-opener.

I had met him several times at my father's at Nîmes and in various devout households, and recall my name to him.

"Ah, my dear son," he says gently, "I am indeed surprised to see you here."

"And I to see you, Monsignor!"

He smiles and pats my cheek with his right hand on which shines the amethyst ring passed over the silk glove. Anatole France waits on the first landing, leaning against the bannister. He has dressed up in his finest to receive the bishop. His fullest, most sumptuous dressing-gown envelops him, girt at the loins with an antique tasselled cord of gold and yellow. On his head is the most brilliant of his skull caps; for out of all the collection of caps—moiré, silk, velvet, Persian cloth, Jouy cloth—he has chosen one of cardinal red. The contrast between the bishop and the writer is striking. While the prelate at the foot of the stairs seems like a poor curate, shivering with cold and shyness, come to beg alms for some poor hamlet in the Cévennes, the author of the *Anneau d' Amèthyste* with his great height, his fine woollen gown, and the purple-red cap, appears like a prince of the Church. He descends some steps and takes the bishop's hands in his.

"Monsignor," he says in a devout voice that seems to issue from his nose, "I am deeply conscious, as indeed I ought to be, of the great honour that you do me." And he makes a low bow.

We go into the library where a magnificent fire is crackling. The two men seat themselves, one on each side of it, under the stone cowl, Anatole France with his back to the light.

The bishop opens the conversation laboriously.

"My friends and colleagues," he explains, "and others in whom I repose much confidence, think that it is my duty to present myself as candidate for the Academy. Oh, I know how unworthy I am to sit among so many illustrious men of letters! But the illustrious daughter of the Great Cardinal, remembering her pious and royal origin, has always reserved some seats for members of the higher clergy. If I entered under the Cupola it would be, I confess, not with the pen, but with the crozier in my hand. To be frank, I hesitated for long. But my friends pronounced a word that is irresistible to me, the word 'duty.' That is why I have asked you to receive me, and I am deeply grateful to the custom that allows me, before descending to the tomb, to set eyes on the most illustrious of our contemporary writers."

While Monsignor de Cabrières is paying him this compliment, Anatole France plays with the heavy gold ring that ornaments his little finger. He turns it, polishes it with his dressing-gown, and

seems absorbed in contemplation of the intaglio, which represents a naked cupid bending his bow.

The prelate continues in a firmer voice:

"To be quite frank, it is only by hearsay that I am acquainted with your literary merits. I have never read a single line of your work. And I must confess to you the reason why: it would be unbearable to me to read anything against my mother."

"Your mother, Monsignor!"

"Yes, my mother, Holy Church."

France replies promptly:

"Monsignor, I know that you are one of the lights of the Church, that your doctrine is pure, your zeal worthy of an apostle, and your eloquence irresistible. But I have never read your episcopal charges. I am, however, infinitely obliged to you for so clearly bringing home to me this precious truth, that it is not possible to be at once a good Catholic and a good republican."

Silence falls for some minutes. Only the spitting of the logs is heard.

"I have a great fondness for your episcopal town," says Anatole France for the sake of saying something. "I still see with my mind's eye the three marble graces whose nude figures are like a ray of light in the square of your charming Montpellier."

Monsignor de Cabrières makes a gesture as much as to say that these insufficiently clad damsels of stone are beyond the episcopal jurisdiction.

Another long pause. To keep the dying conversation going, Anatole France sings the praises of the treasures in the museum at Montpellier. He speaks of the collections of Albany, Fabre, and Bruyas. He describes the *Stratonica* by Ingres. He mentions one of Poussin's *Sacraments.*

The bishop, more and more nervous, snatches at the name of Poussin as one that may bring back a good academic odour of orthodoxy to the interview. He praises the great painter's piety and descants on the theme: "The mind is not always on the same level as the heart. Faith is not incompatible with genius, as witness St. Augustine, Pascal, Bossuet, and Chateaubriand."

At the name of the viscount, M. Bergeret gives a jump.

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DISTRUST THE VISCOUNT

"Clearly, Monsignor, Chateaubriand was a great example. But of what? Of piety? Or of sensual feeling? I am somewhat taken aback, I confess, to see a prelate of your distinction couple the name of so presuming an author as René with those of the Fathers. Did Chateaubriand render you such good service with his *Génie du Christianisme* and his pretentiously edifying novels? Confess now: he was a great sensualist."

"But the *Martyrs?*"

"Why, he made the *Martyrs* a storehouse of classical antiquity. Moreover, proud son of the

Church that he was, he inherited all Jean Jacques' boredom and disgust for life."

"He served the cause of God and of the King."

"Yes, and compromised them both. He went to God, as he went to the Tuileries, because God had good furniture. He saw nothing in religion but its romantic side and pomps and ceremonies. This great man, whose works you give as prizes in your institution, was, you must admit, the most sacrilegious of moderns. He even went beyond Jean Jacques; he was a Rousseau turned choir-boy and drunk with sacramental wine. Chateaubriand was beyond all doubt the begetter of the neo-Catholics—all the Barbey d'Aurevillys, Baudelaires, Huysmans, Péladans. Velleda is cousin to Lélia. And you cannot be unaware that this mystic, penitential dilettante was the discoverer of a new literary poison. A delicious poison that we have all drunk with delight: poetical exoticism."

"At the same time it cannot be denied that it was Chateaubriand who gave us back the taste for our national antiquities after the vandalism of the Revolution."

"Ah, there we are! Your Chateaubriand was a greater iconoclast than the whole Revolution. He did not break your saints: he did worse, he relegated them to the museum. Till his time the collector's hand was stayed at the portals of the Sanctuary. It only pillaged Olympus. It was the viscount, that *enfant terrible* of Catholicism, who brought

heaven and the Virgin and the saints into the show-cases of the lover of antiques."

Anatole France makes a gesture full of episcopal unction with the hand on which gleams the little naked god and his bow towards the cases of Madonnas and Tanagras that ornament the room in sisterly reconciliation. He continues:

"It is thanks to the viscount that reliquaries fill bric-à-brac shops where Christs and Buddhas jostle one another, and that ladies of light virtue cover their pianos and drape their alcoves with ecclesiastical vestments impregnated with incense and holy oil. Ah, it was a singularly ill-turn that Chateaubriand did you!"

Silence falls again, still heavier. The logs burn red. There is a touch of feverish anxiety in the library. France rises.

"I trust that you will be elected, Monsignor."

"I have been promised some votes," admits the prelate, rising too. "But who can tell? The Immortals are like other men: they are unstable."

They go out. M. Bergeret insists on accompanying the bishop to the foot of the stairs. He takes the poor cloak from a chair and gently, with the unctuous gestures of a sub-deacon, drapes it on his visitor's shoulder.

"Monsieur France," says Monsignor de Cabrières with a bow, "I did not expect to receive this investiture from you."

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PRELATE TO PRELATE SUCCEEDS

The following Wednesday Monsignor Duchesne comes in his turn to the Villa Said to accomplish his duty as a candidate for Immortality. The audience is of the most courteous description. They are old acquaintances, for Anatole France has often met the ecclesiastical historian at the Commendatore Giacomo Boni's, the director of excavations at Rome. They have many a time passed together through the little northern gate, unknown to the public, in the disinterred Forum. Various remarks attributed to M. Goubin and to Nicole Langelier have at times fallen from the sarcastic lips of the director of the French School, under the shade of the laurels and laburnums in the garden overlooking the cattle market of papal Rome.

Anatole France embraces Father Duchesne.

"Now I shall be able to call you 'dear colleague,' Monsignor. Thus shall I be sanctified; and I have great need of it. For you will be elected, to your own glory and that of the Academy. (Fresh embrace.) You are my candidate—although I shall take good care not to do you the ill-turn of going to vote for you. I should only lose you votes. I am no longer in good odour with the Academy and have not been there since the Dreyfus case. If I did present myself at those immortal doors, I am by no means sure that the ushers would let me in: they would probably not recognize me. Never have I so much regretted my impotence—my impotence, that is, as an Immortal. But you will emerge

with triumph from the election, and I shall sing a Te Deum, first for the Academy which has such need of a little prestige, and then for you, Monsignor. Do not think that I exaggerate the benefits or the grandeur of our Immortality. But the Academy will serve you as a sanctuary. It is more Catholic than the pope, more royalist than the king, and is the sole religious corporation recognized by the Republic; nay more, it is courted and subventioned. It inspires Rome with wholesome fear. The short phrase 'Member of the Académie Française' on the title-page of your books will be worth more to you than any *Nil Obstat* or *Imprimatur*. It will muzzle the dogs of the Holy Inquisition, and they will no longer dare to smell out in your learned and charming works the scent of modernism which they discover everywhere, especially since Pius X."

"If I am a modernist, I am so in goodly company: Robert Simon, the founder of the exegesis, and Lannoy de Tillemont, and Adrien Baillet. Under the Republic things are considered heterodox that might freely be written in the seventeenth century under the great king. Then, the Gallican church, which by reason of its learning and its merits was a guiding light for other churches, found a defender in the *Parlement*. Today there is no longer a Gallican church and ultramontanism reigns. It is the triumph of the Beast. God, to punish his people, has put an illiterate Venetian gondolier at the helm of Peter's ship, and

a pretty mess he makes of it in stormy weather. It is really sad to hear the poor man, who is wholly without intelligence, interpreting the oracles of the Holy Spirit. Learning apart, if he had what passes all learning—goodness, charity, indulgence—all would be well. But since donning the tiara he has not ceased to punish, to interdict, and to curse. His hand is always raised, not to bless, but to excommunicate. He is the puppet of his counsellors—and what counsellors! They represent our pious, reasonable France to him as being on the eve of a schism. The law of separation, alas, has decapitated the French episcopate. The bishops who accept the concordat lack credit or, rather, are actually suspect. Their mitres are stained with the original sin of the tricolour, and, to obtain pardon for their favour with republican ministers, they pass their time in perpetual abasement before Rome. The others since the separation are not worth mentioning. They are pious, narrow, country bumpkins who have forgotten nothing, because they never learned anything. They seem to have been exhumed from some dark, airless sepulchre where they have lain rotting since M. de Frayssinous. Small observances have taken the place of great duties. The noble religion of Jean Gerson, Joan of Arc, Fénélon, and Lamennais has been Italianized. What a change since Leo XIII! But I am too old to cut such capers. You are right: I seek a chair at the Academy to avoid the persecution of the monks who pull all the strings nowadays.

My candidature is a sort of protest. I, who am a priest sprung from the people, a Breton and a lover of the Church and the Republic, am standing forth against a bishop who is a nobleman and a royalist. If the Bishop of Montpellier were elected, he would bring in with him under the Cupola that spirit of pietism which cramps heart and brain."

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YOU WILL BE IMMORTAL FOR YOUR SINS

"He will not be elected, you may be certain. And I shall sing the Te Deum in your honour. Yes, yes; you will soon take your seat in the chair of Cardinal Mathieu, of whom I have been told so many pleasing anecdotes. You will succeed him that your sins may be remitted. You will make us a fine address, full of sweet reason and learning. I shall play my own unworthy part on the occasion by my fireside. I shall read your address devoutly, for your sermons are for honest folk and your parish is that of common sense. But you will be ill repaid. You will have in your turn to swallow many mightily tedious addresses. And you will know the gloomy sterility of grammatical discussions on the Dictionary committee."

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THE GRAMMARIAN AND THE WRITER

Now Anatole France is off on one of his favourite hobbies. A Grammarian is one thing, a writer is another. Grammar is an art. Style is a gift. You are born with your style, just as you are born with your voice. It is possible to correct your

timbre or your ear, but it is no more possible to become a tenor by deciphering operas or reading manuals of singing than to become a writer of excellence by studying grammatical treatises. Unless he have more precious receipts than these, no grammarian has ever been able to write one good page. To find examples of his rules he must go to writers who write according to their instinct. Moreover he will find as many bad, as good, examples in the classics. There follows a comparison of the academician, disguised one Thursday in each month as a grammarian, with the circus clown imitating the juggler and the lady of the *haute école*. He smashes bottles to make the children laugh. Instead of flying away from the touch of the paper hoop, like a bee from a rose, he falls heavily in the sawdust. His job is to be a buffoon, and he entrances the audience.

"I should like the sittings of the Dictionary committee to be public. I should go there then, but among the public: there is so little pleasure in this wicked world! I should see you, Monsignor, darning the old Dictionary in company with a crowd of Penelopes without grace or beauty."

The comparison surprises Monsignor Duchesne. He appears to be playing hunt-the-slipper with the cord of his hat.

"I am grateful to you for comparing me to the daughter of Icarus. Let me pursue your pleasing Homeric comparison a little further. Since you put the work-box of Ulysses' wife into my hands, I shall

embroider a short reflection upon that precious canvas. To judge by the needlework accomplished nowadays by faithful, unoccupied women, Madam Penelope's tapestry must have been a poor thing. You only have to look at the chasubles, slippers, cushions, and foot-cosies that devout ladies work for ecclesiastics. Merely the way they mix silk and wool denotes the exasperation of their souls. We can but praise Providence who turns their ardour to innocent, if futile, distractions. God will ask us for a strict account of our lost time; yet there is much difference between losing one's time and employing it to offend divine justice. To do nothing is truly not to do good; but neither is it to do ill."

"I see what you are getting at!"

"You go no longer to the Mazarine Chapel, but to whom do you give the time that was once set aside for the Dictionary? To God, or to the devil? Oh, I did not come here with the object of confessing you!"

Anatole France, adorned with his purple cap, curves his back, lowers his eyes, crosses episcopal hands on a breast of humiliation, and purrs devoutly:

"Give me your blessing, Father, for I have sinned greatly!"

"Yes, my son," replies Monsignor Duchesne, entering into the game, "yes, my dear and illustrious son, you have sinned greatly. But there are degrees of evil. To desert the Academy is a venial

sin. Whereas lust and the delights of the flesh lead straight to hell."

"Are you so sure of that? I am not so absurd as to think of debating with so subtle a divine as you. It is not for the budding cleric to teach tricks to the canon. But I will open my soul candidly to you. And much I fear that they will go to hell, not the poor devils who obey the law of nature, but the proud ones who meet in a chapel to throw bouquets at one another and epithets meet only for the Olympians. They commit the most abominable of all sins, the sin that brought into the world labour and sorrow and love and death: the sin of pride."

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THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Madame remarks:

"A new suit! A new tie! Patent leather boots! Why, you are becoming quite unrecognizable. You have actually taken to using scent! That's a very poor kind of eau-de-cologne, by the way: it smells of lemon. Pray, have you discovered the Fountain of Youth?"

"Alas, no, Madame. Even should I discover it the same thing would happen to me that happened to the hero of the fable. He was a man of ripe age, like me, and being on the brink of the grave set himself to reflect on eternity. So he took a palmer's staff and cockle-shell and started off for Rome, to obtain absolution for his sins: of which he stood in dire need, for they were egregious, and the pope alone could undertake such a washing-day

as would be needed. He kissed the pontiff's slipper, and '*Ego te absolvo,*' said the pope, 'but for your penance you must go a pilgrimage to the land of Cockaigne.'"

"Oh la, la! That was a charming penance!"

"Patience, patience! That good country, you know, is specially blest of God. Eternal spring reigns there. All along the roads and the streets stand tables groaning beneath the weight of hams and pies and galantines of which you can sit down and eat your bellyful. Day and night the shops are open: you go in and come out as you list, carrying off whatever you like—and the good woman of the shop into the bargain if she is comely. There are rivers of wine and lakes of cream, as in the country of Papimanie of the priest of Meudon or in the Isle of Pleasures of the Bishop of Cambrai."

"Every child sucking its thumb knows that. Don't spin it out so! You are not paid by the yard. Come to the Fountain of Youth!"

"In the fair land of Cockaigne all is in common——"

"The women too?"

"The women, like everything else."

"Delightful country, upon my word!"

"Ah, yes indeed. They are all fair and all gracious. Every morning they bathe in the Fountain of Youth: thus they never lose their freshness."

"At last we've got there!"

"Whoever bathes in that spring, be he old or

gouty, grey-haired, bent, or toothless, comes out shining with youth and a set of new teeth."

"Well, well, and what about the penitent sent by the pope to get absolution in the land of Cockaigne? You've quite forgotten him."

"No, I have not forgotten him. He was old like me. And there he was, just ready to step into the waters of the miraculous fountain, when he suddenly thought of the oldest of his true loves. His soul was so tender that he clapped on his clothes again and went off to look for her, to bring her back with him to the Fountain of Youth."

"How very touching!"

"Alas! Once out of the land of Cockaigne, do what he would he could never find the way back there. The moral of which is that, when we are well off, we should never think of our friends."

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HEREDIA'S TIES

"You like Heredia's sonnets? They are so laboured, and so artificial! He has a horror of simplicity. He collects rare words as children do pebbles and bits of glass, and pillages dictionaries looking for them. To give himself inspiration, he gets drunk on the Alphabetical List of Precious Stones or the Catalogue of the Artillery Museum. Théophile Gautier did the same, but in a less frenzied way. Heredia's work, being manufactured with the dictionary, consequently needs the dictionary to decipher it like some sonorous antique inscription. He is a worker in mosaic.

His poetry has no sense or depth, but is a sort of incantation like a lullaby for babies, entirely exterior. It's true that it glitters. He stuck into it all the treasures of his ancestors, the conquistadors, in which he had the belief of a man in a fortune of which he has been robbed. And, although he was disinherited of the fabulous wealth of his forbears, he was yet the most gilded of all gilded youths. He had plenty of money and he was extremely handsome; which was an injustice, for good looks are enough in themselves. He used to wear ties as glittering as his sonnets. For the rest, he was one of the best men in the world."

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CREDO QUIA ABSURDUM

"The best theological argument in the arsenal of believers is still *Credo Quia Absurdum,* the proof of God by absurdity. I believe, because I do not understand. To understand is human, therefore it is not divine. That is a thesis capable of being supported. But then, to be sure of your salvation, you must, out of all the religions, choose the one that is most absurd, that is to say, most divine. You will tell me that ours is no whit worse in that respect than those of other peoples. That is a national prejudice, my dear friend, a form of patriotism. Our dogmas have been greatly enlarged to make them fit in with all sorts of necessities, so that they are like a patched coat, well-worn, and comfortable to wear. Our religion is as variegated as a Harlequin's dress. Imagine

Jean Gerson, or one of the learned men of Port-Royal, coming back to life and going into one of our fashionable churches. They wouldn't stay there long. These Italianized little ceremonies, these wee altars to St. Anthony of Padua, and Our Lady of Lourdes, and Our Lady of la Salette, and the Blessed Heart would make them cry out: 'Idolatry!'

"If absurdity is a form of grace, I am ready to turn Buddhist or fire-worshipper or Parsee or Shintoist. It is not that I think those faiths are more absurd than ours, but their absurdity is altogether foreign, and consequently still more absurd and more divine."

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NAPOLEON THE SUBLIME BUFFOON

"Napoleon was a sublime buffoon. The most illuminating anecdote I know about him is that when he was at Lyons on his way back from the Isle of Elba. That is really the pearl of my collection. You know that he landed in Provence with a handful of old soldiers. Practically he had neither troops nor money. Three or four of his men he sent as ambassadors to Antibes, where they were put in prison. The mule laden with his slender treasury fell over a precipice. A bad beginning for the conquest of France! Avoiding the departments of the South which had renounced Cæsar after the abdication, he reached Grenoble and Lyons by the mountains. At Avignon, to avoid being cut to pieces like Brune, the Emperor,

the anointed of the Lord, had to put on a footman's livery and sit beside the coachman. But you know all that. Let's come to Lyons. There he is at one end of the bridge of La Guillotière. At the other end of the bridge are the troops of the Duc d'Angoulême. On one bank, anarchy: an outlawed adventurer whom anyone can destroy like a mad dog. He who shall kill Napoleon and rid the kings of his nightmare will be made duke, prince, or millionaire—he will be the darling of providence! On the other bank, order, legitimacy, authority, the army.

"Napoleon was brave; but he was ridiculous. Up the incline of the bridge he advances, alone, his hand in his breast. He has no prestige, save the prestige of an image from the Epinal factories. He wears the uniform of the light infantry of the Guard. On horseback, you know, he looked well enough, but on foot like a bow-legged counter-jumper. Now he forbids his soldiers to follow him: there are not so many that he can risk them! If he can cross the bridge, he will have regained France and legality. The outlaw will then be the law. But there's the regular army! He's at the mercy of a single shot. He advances in traditional style. The old soldiers recognize him and wave their bearskins on the point of their bayonets. And what does Napoleon do? This is the point where his buffoonery touches the sublime. He rushes on the soldier who is loudest in crying: 'Long live the Emperor!' shakes him

like a plum tree, and in a terrible voice shouts: 'You have betrayed your chief! I have no love for traitors! Now I trust that you will make me forget your treason, by fighting at my side against the enemies of France!'

"That is to say in plain French: 'I trust that you will plunge still deeper into your treason by fighting for me.' And the old soldier, who could have killed him and won a fortune, only shouts the louder: 'Long live the Emperor!'"

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AN HISTORIC SAYING

"Napoleon possessed in a supreme degree the thoroughly Italian art of ennobling common things. My friend, Xavier de Ricard, once told me a very significant fact about his grandfather who was at Waterloo. He was a lad of barely seventeen, for Napoleon owing to lack of men combed even the schools for soldiers. Thus in that happy time you might pass from the history class to history and sometimes to posterity, without other transition than by exchanging your college cap for the Light Volunteers' uniform. It was in the Light Volunteers, I think, that young de Ricard was put. During the battle the emperor wanted to mount his horse. He was suffering that day from hemorrhoids, an incommodity to which several historians have attributed the loss of the day. From what does not the fate of empires depend! Cleopatra's nose may be the finger of God! The emperor then wants to mount. He calls a soldier

to help him into the saddle and young de Ricard, drunk with joy and pride, stoops, forms a stirrup with his hands, and hoists up the emperor with such enthusiasm—that he goes right over the other side of his horse. Napoleon falls to earth like a sack of potatoes, and rising, pale in the face, shouts: 'Imbecile! Idiot! You shall be shot!'

"Imagine the soul of the poor schoolboy, disguised as a soldier, who begins his career by upsetting his emperor! Something like Fabrice del Dongo in the *Chartreuse de Parme.* The lad follows the emperor like his shadow, for thinks he, if he is to be shot, he must not go elsewhere: it would be cowardice on his part to go and get shot by the enemy! Meanwhile things go from bad to worse for France. But the lad notices nothing; all he thinks is: 'When am I to be shot?' At the end of the day, in the midst of the rout, Napoleon recognizes him and, with a smile, pats him with his fevered hand on the cheek covered with the down of youth. 'My boy,' he says, 'never forget that in the day of defeat you helped your emperor into the saddle.'

"You perceive the dodge? Out of a caricature he makes an emblem of heroism."

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CÆSAR'S WIFE CANNOT BE FALSE

"When he was at St. Helena, Napoleon knew quite well that his wife was false to him. He could not be ignorant of the scandal of Marie-Louise's life with Neipperg, for Louis XVIII's

government was base enough to send him daily accounts of their vile deeds—almost the only news in fact that was allowed to reach the captive. Well, he pretended to know nothing about it. He would constantly speak of Marie-Louise's early arrival to join him and dictated protests against the attitude of the courts of France and Vienna who prevented the most virtuous of wives from coming to join her husband in prison. He knew day by day, and hour by hour how he was made a fool of, but he was determined to play the comedy, or, rather, the tragedy, out. An emperor must not be deceived by his wife in the sight of all posterity. So in his will he awarded the flighty empress a magnificent certificate of conjugal fidelity."

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HANDS OFF

"He used to terrify women, who feared his favour almost as much as his disfavour, seeing that he treated them like so many courtesans in a camp. Only a cad could have done as he did when a woman who was in love with him asked for his portrait and he gave her a napoleon, saying: 'Take that one.'

"Sometimes he used to go to masked balls and flitted about in disguise among the ladies who were compelled by order to be present—just like soldiers on parade! But in spite of his hood and domino, the ogre could always be recognized by his habit of going with one hand in his waistcoat

and the other behind his back, and the couples would be struck stiff with fright while he passed. One day while he was playing a blindman's-buff he passed his hands over a young ballet dancer's eyes. 'Oh, what ugly hands!' cried out the thoughtless creature. Napoleon was completely nonplussed and protested: 'No, they're not! Look! Look and see how small and white they are!' for he was very vain of his hands and feet."

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NATURAL HISTORY

"Like all men from over the Alps Napoleon was grotesquely pompous. When he was choosing the arms for the Empire, some proposed the lion, the king of beasts; others the Gallic cock.

"'I want none of your cock,' he cried in disgust. 'A creature that lives on the dung-hill and lets itself be gobbled up by the fox! I want the eagle, the bird that bears Jove's thunder and looks the sun in the face!'

"That's what you might call natural history reasons."

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HE WAS A CORPORAL

"One thing is impossible to deny: that he had an extraordinary memory. But it was a memory not for ideas but for figures, a sort of counting-house memory.

"'My affairs,' he said, 'are classified in my brain as in a desk. When I want to put something

aside I shut one drawer and open another. When I want to sleep I shut all the drawers and I do sleep.'

"He also said: 'I am incapable of remembering a line of poetry. But I know all my establishment reports by heart.' He was not boasting, as he proved once to one of his generals. 'I have read your establishment reports,' he said. 'They are correct with the exception of two pieces of cannon you have omitted. There are two 'fours' on the high road outside the town,' the town in question being one of the innumerable small places in France like Quimper, Corentin, or Pézenas.

"He delighted in intimidating people by unexpected questions, like 'posers' put to schoolboys, without giving them time to reply.

"He was, besides, as brutal as any corporal. Once at a ball he asked a lady in tone of a custom-house officer demanding her passport, 'Are you married? Have you any children? How many? When are you leaving?' He *was* a corporal.

"There was a great banquet given at Orleans in 1808 when Napoleon was passing through the town. Vast feasts and rejoicings were organized at an unheard of cost with specially formed guards of honour and what not. The bishop, the prefect, the general, and the municipal authorities outdid one another in devotion and servility. Finally Napoleon arrived covered with dust and out of temper. While he was devouring a wing of snipe

at dinner, he suddenly turned to one of the members of the municipal council:

"'What's the population of the town?'

"'About forty or fifty thousand souls, sire.'

"'Is it forty, or is it fifty? You should know.'

"Another 'poser' to the neighbour on his left:

"'How far is it from here to the mouth of the Orleans canal?'

"'I do not know exactly, sire.'

"'You ought to know!'

"The same question was put to the other guests. One said: 'A league.' Others: 'A league and a half.' Napoleon only laughed at their contradictions. Finally he attacked the mayor.

"'How much is there in the municipal treasury?'

"'Three hundred thousand francs, sire.'

"'Good. I will take them.'

"Then the mayor, his brow wet with terror, handed over the three hundred thousand francs of the good town of Orleans, never to see them again. It is true that Mr. Mayor was made a baron of the Empire."

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THE GUILTIEST

"His mother, Laetitia, the *madre Romana,* as his biographers comically call her, was really a character of comedy. What people took for dignity in her was perpetual ill-humour. She had a good deal of the *beffana,* the witch that is used to frighten Roman children, and also something of

Madame Pernelle. She was greedy of money and suspicious. At bottom she grudged Napoleon his successes and his glory and never forgave him for supplanting his elder brother, Joseph. When did anybody hear of the inheritance going to a younger son in a good Corsican family? And the inheritance of the Bonapartes was France, and a few other kingdoms. Napoleon visibly submitted to the ascendancy of his mother. He listened to her talky-talk and professed to find it good sense. It was in order to pacify her that he gave thrones to Joseph and Lucien and his sisters, and to all the *gens,* including even the inept Junot. The Duchesse d'Albany said an admirable thing about Laetitia, the *madre Romana,* who looks in David's picture of the coronation like one of the Fates or some phantom of misfortune. After Waterloo she took refuge with Fesch at Rome, where the populace hissed her. 'Perhaps,' wrote the duchess, 'the Romans were wrong to hoot the decrepit old thing. It seems she is a good woman. For me, she is simply the guiltiest womb in Christendom.'"

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I NEED NO GLORY

"After all Napoleon had the good sense of the common folk from whom he sprung, and where this popular good sense shows most vigorously is in the corrections of the *Moniteur,* the proofs of which on being submitted to him he slashed about with forcible annotations. Thus during the war in Spain, the official editor had written after a bat-

tle: 'The emperor with forces much inferior to the enemy inflicted a decisive defeat on him.' In the margin Napoleon wrote: 'Idiot! I need no glory. I have more than I want already. But I need people to think that I have soldiers, and I have not.' Cutting out the sentence, he replaced it by: 'At the head of forces far superior to those of the enemy, the emperor gained a brilliant victory.'

"Another example of Napoleon's good common sense. A prefect of a department in the South where a sort of guerilla royalist rebellion was going on, wrote to him 'that the deserters had taken refuge in the woods, but that he had put the gendarmes on their track and he hoped to bring them back to barracks.' Napoleon jocularly remarked: 'Tell him to leave the deserters alone. They are cowards who will never be any good as soldiers, and would turn tail at the first shot. But tell him to send me his gendarmes without an instant's delay. They at all events are fighting men!'"

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THE GREAT MAN WAS NOT A MAN

"He was a buffoon, and a sick man. His father and his grandfather both died of cancer: scirrhus it was called then. It was from them that he inherited the infirmity which has made the poetically inclined compare him to Prometheus being torn by the vulture. The great man was not a man at all; or at least, hardly. You only have to read in the report of his autopsy of the astonishment of

the English surgeons at the feminine appearance of the emperor's corpse. He was never really attracted by the fair sex, and only loved one woman: glory—or war, for to him they were the same. Like the greater number of despots, he was a perturbed spirit and set the world by the ears because he was incapable of enjoying his own bed. Before you come to social inequalities, there are the inequalities of nature. Why am I ugly, feeble, and deformed? Why was my brother born with charming features that open all women's hearts to him? There you have the origin of the *Contrat Social*. It's because Jean Jacques was a cold fish that he set the whole earth on fire. In the East most revolutions have been made by eunuchs. Say what you will, it's the same with us. After '89 the bill of the political stage was topped by bastards, hunchbacks, and the lame, halt, and impotent. Napoleon was not, in the strict sense of the word, impotent, but he wasn't a particularly lusty fellow either. Not much of the Luxor obelisk about him! Was he ever really in love? Did he ever feel what Plato compares to 'the horses bolting with the chariot of the soul?' With the dog's life that he led, he hardly had the time.

"A galley-slave has a happier life than Napoleon. He worked everywhere and always: at table, at the theatre, in his carriage, in his bath. He hardly slept three hours a night. He wore every one out. He was not a man, but a machine. Of course various love-idylls are attributed to him,

but such poor idylls, like a corporal's romances! Once in Egypt he felt a sudden attraction for his neighbour at table, the wife of one of his colleagues. He snatched up a decanter and upset it on the fair one's dress and then took her into his room under pretext of drying it, while the good husband, faithful to his place in the hierarchy, waited.

"No, he was a man who never loved anyone but himself. As for Josephine, that was a mere affair. She dazzled him, and her flat in the Rue Chantereine was well furnished and supplied with good linen. If he had known that the bills were unpaid and the silver hired, perhaps he would have married Montansier.

"Then there was his quarrel with George, when he turned her out naked in the presence of the sentry presenting arms!

"Isn't that a scene that would sell the seats at the Vaudeville at five times their price?"

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CÆSAR'S IMPOTENCE

"The island of St. Helena appears to us through the fog of history as a kind of Mt. Sinai, on which the emperor stands, his head wreathed in lightning. But you only have to glance through the memoirs of the men who followed him into exile, and even the *Mémorial,* to be struck by the burlesque character of the end of the tragedy. Sir Hudson Lowe was not quite so black as he was painted, and his prisoner was insupportable. He imagined himself always emperor. When he was

at Elba in the space of a few months Napoleon turned the island topsy-turvy, had a port built and roads made, and gave a constitution to the inhabitants. If his gaoler had allowed him, he would have transformed St. Helena into a French department. The fact is that he was dying of boredom at not being able to govern, pardon, blow up ministers, issue proclamations, impose taxes, and foil conspiracies. The man's activity was prodigious to the point of being unwholesome and doubtless sprang from a physical defect in him. Great man as he was, you know, Napoleon—how shall I put it? He was, yes, he was distinctly reserved with the fair sex. He certainly loved Josephine, and had two or three other little affairs; but that's not much for a man, especially an emperor. We are not to suppose that opportunities were lacking. Well, he not only did not seek them: he fled from them.

"The Corsican corporal came out in his positively blackguardly behaviour with the charming Custine. She was drawn up in line with all the Court one Sunday morning at the Tuileries, as he came from Mass. Going straight to her he said in his harsh drill sergeant's voice:

"'Are you as fond of men as ever?'

"Brute! But she took him down finely, emperor or no.

"'Yes, sire,' she answered, 'when' they are polite.'

"Courageous little woman, she avenged her

sex! No man susceptible of passion could have behaved like that. Notice, too, that he was completely taken by surprise and looked quite disconcerted. At bottom he did not like women. He despised them. He was lacking in the capacity for love. Oh, I know that it is said: 'he had not a lover's disposition, because he had not time for love.' How very simple to be sure! He had not a lover's disposition, because he was physically incomplete and because, just as in the case of Jean Jacques, his infirmity was the cause of his ambition and his genius. The doctor who performed the autopsy on him before embalming the body has left us no doubt on the point. When the body was stripped, it had an almost feminine appearance. Napoleon was plump—delicately fat. His breasts were developed beyond the normal. *Et nunc erudimini,* as Bossuet says. If Laetitia Ramolino's son overturned the world and made blood run like rainwater, it was because he was impotent."

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JUPITER SCAPIN

"By blood Napoleon belonged to that supple, prolific race, that furnishes the world with Cæsars, popes, tenors, cooks, and diplomatists. Cassander, Pancrace, Dr. Tartaglia, Machiavelli, Mazarin, the Abbé Galiani, Marforio, Pasquino, and so forth. His compatriots—not the Corsicans, but the Italians—had no doubt about it themselves. When the pope was hesitating whether to go to Napoleon's coronation, the cardinals said to him:

'You should go, holy Father. He is an Italian, whom we are imposing on the barbarians.'

"And so the pope came as gilt on the coronation ginger-bread. What a tragi-comedy, as Alfred de Vigny said! Who was it nicknamed Napoleon 'Jupiter Scapin?' There you have the whole thing. He was a buffoon, and he was sublime; and that is what cast a spell on the populace. The great Napoleon had one foot all the time in the gutter. Look at the nicknames that his old soldiers gave him: 'the little crop head,' 'the little corporal.' And the innumerable popular images of him, of which the most famous is that on top of the column. With his odd face, scanty attire, and strange hair, he looks like Gnaffron![1] Only the slapstick is wanting. These reproductions tell a tale of themselves. What Georgin would try to depict the reign of Louis XIV in Epinal images? Yet the Sun-King had his coronation and victories and mistresses and defeats, and his pompous death. If Napoleon crossed the Beresina, Louis XIV crossed the Rhine. Both of them quarrelled with the pope. But the king remains majestic, even when he is playing billiards, and defies caricature. He is always in his great wig and always noble, even on his stool. Whatever Michelet may say of Louis XIV's fistula, it did not make him ridiculous and he bore the operation with the dignity befitting a Sun-King. No one would have dreamed of putting him into street songs or on to

[1] Gnaffron is a character in the Lyons Punch and Judy.—J. P.

the lids of snuff-boxes. Whereas without Béranger and the hawkers Napoleon, or at least the Napoleonic legend, would not exist. That is the triumph of vulgarity."

"At the same time, from the literary point of view, his proclamations and correspondence—"

"All that is hocussed, my friend. He had a band of pedants who parrotted him and manufactured his historic sayings. When he spoke out of his own head he was comic, trivial, and as for being eloquent, why, my poor boy, he didn't know French. He used to gabble a sort of half Italian jargon. He spoke like a concierge and said 'armistice' for 'amnesty,' and 'section' for 'session.'"

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YOU TAKE ME ABACK

"It was a young priest, still fresh from the mould of the seminary, and a bit of an ass. He was confessing for the first time. Before sending him to the holy tribunal his vicar had admonished him:

"'My friend, make the penance fit the number of times that the sin has been committed. The best is to manage it by twos: if the penitent has sinned twice, make him tell his beads so many dozen times; if four times, double the penance; if six times, triple it.'

"'That is what I will do, sir,' said the abbé, with a heart full of innocence, and went to shut himself up in the holy cupboard:

"There came a young girl who knelt and cried 'Peccavi.'

"'Father,' said she, 'I accuse myself of having committed the sin of the flesh.'

"'How often, my child?'

"'Three times, my Father.'

"'Three times? You take me somewhat aback, my child. I have no penance arranged for three times, but only for two or four. Go away and do it again and then come back.'"

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HE HAS GIVEN ME A CROOKED NOSE

He has hung the portrait painted of him by Carrière in the bathroom, on top of the mirror, between some Japanese prints and satirical water-colours by Gyp with curious inscriptions. One represents Anatole France in the midst of all his heroines. Another has a number of dogs in unbecoming attitudes.

"How have you the impudence to relegate this masterpiece of Carrière's to this place along with your footbath and your tooth-brushes?" asks Madame.

"If it's a masterpiece, I can only say it is not a masterpiece of likeness! He has given me a crooked nose."

"He has drawn your nose as he sees it."

"He has painted me in the middle of a cloud coming from a prodigious kind of calumet that spouts torrents of smoke like a sulphur geyser. Why, it's more than ten years since I have smoked anything but medicated cigarettes."

"It is a sacrilege to leave that portrait in so discourteous a place!"

"That's true. The more I look at it, the more I comprehend the delicious sadness of living."

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BERLIN, A BARRACKS

"Berlin is a fine, regular, well arranged town; but, as you have seen from my postcards, there is not one original building in it. The palaces, museums, and churches seem like a caricature of ours. It's true, there are colossal shops, by the side of which our Bon Marchés and Louvres are but nutshells, vast jumble sales in which you can get not only dresses but your dinner. There are departments for hams and jam, just as for ties and shoes. A Frenchman feels a little out of place there. The Berliners are not lacking in amiability and when they knew who I was they showered heavy attentions on me. But courtesy is not the custom of their streets. My age, my beard, and my white hair did not save me from being frequently shoved off the pavement into the gutter by some brute going on his way with the blind obstinacy of a cannon-ball. I positively had the breath knocked out of me. One day I got such a violent jolt in the region of the liver—where I am very sensitive, you know—that I almost fell under a carriage. Then they explained to me that it was my fault; that instead of complaining, I ought to apologize, for in Germany, the land of order, there was one pavement for people going one way and another for

those going the other. I was shown notice-boards where it was all written up. Everybody must obey these meticulous regulations, except of course, officers of high rank, for whom way must be made. I asked my Berlin friends who were so amiable and attentive: 'But what happens to the lunatic, the lover and the poet in the midst of all these notice-boards?' The kind Berliners answered: 'They are taken to the police-station and are heavily fined or sometimes put in prison.' How nice for them! The capital of Germany is a model of order, and poets and other dreamers must get out of the town and wander in the country.

"A policeman made us a regular scene on account of a newspaper that we had left on a bench in the Tiergarten. Happily Madame speaks German like the late Mr. Goethe. When he learned that we were French, the policeman grew more accommodating and excused our misdemeanour in consideration of the national thoughtlessness of France, as being a country without rules or order, where anarchists walk on the right or the left of the street as they wish. The affair ended, as always, with a tip; but I had to pick up the paper and carry it in my humiliated hand to the wire waste-paper basket. Madame was furious. 'Oh, if I had only had my camera!' she sighed. 'I should have taken a photo as evidence of Germanic ferocity.' As for myself I was much tickled by the incident.

"Did you get my postcard showing the guard being changed at the Palace? That's really a spec-

tacle from another age. I watched it one day. It was raining, as it does only at Berlin, pouring as if the water were being emptied in buckets from the low, gloomy sky, so that I could hardly hold up my groaning umbrella under the deluge. But the guard marched past impeccably, with all its glory and its drums and fifes and the soldiers' boots crashing on to the ground so that the water spouted up from the asphalt to join that in the heavens. The poor wretches made me think of the allegorical bronzes in the fountains at Versailles. But here the mythological grandeur was merely burlesque. I can still see a drum-major, topped with a sort of metal mitre as high as a good-sized boy. The rain poured down off that catafalque as off the gable of a garret and rolled along his nose and moustaches in fantastic cascades. And he the while marched impassively throwing his stick towards the angry skies and then taking five or six steps forward, when the stick, enveloped in the tempest, came back to his streaming hands like a trained bird. Humbled in my national pride, I put up a little prayer under my quaking umbrella. I said to the Almighty: 'Lord, if you exist, send a cold in the head to this excessively superb drum-major. Make him sneeze on parade, and let this presumptuous mortal receive the heavy knob of his stick in his massive face. And I will cry to him with all my heart: God bless you!' Alas, the gods do not listen to the prayers of the just, but please themselves with the triumph of iniquity. It was

I who caught the cold in watching the impassive drum-major. It was I who sneezed.

"Then we had another mishap. One afternoon Madame and I went into a café and asked for beer. The proprietor rushed out indignantly, saying: 'Go away at once. I shall give you nothing. This is an officers' café!' Madame whispered to me: 'Then you have the right to be here. Tell him you are an officer of the Legion of Honour.' But we went on to beg a bock elsewhere.

"These officers are really the plague of Berlin. Without them life there would be tolerable, but they are all round you, and everywhere. They brag and they bully, they shove before you into omnibuses and tramways out of their turn. Their manners are insufferable. In Paris a lieutenant who allowed himself to hustle an elderly woman would have his face bashed.

"There is, however, one thing that they have better than ourselves. There are places in the suburbs of Berlin where you can spend the evening for a democratic sum, drink excellent beer, eat good sausages, and listen to real music. Madame and I went one Sunday to one of them where every couple and every family had its own little arbour in the garden; and there is nothing I prize so much in a restaurant as elbow-room and intimacy.

"In these 'restaurant gardens'—there is a name for them, but I've forgotten it, if I ever heard it—every one takes his ease as if he were at home, and can enjoy the intimacy of his arbour as though it

were a private room. Of course, it's only possible in summer. You have at once the freshness of the night and of the beer, the spice of the sausages, and the romantic sound of the symphonies. I know very little about music, not having the ear for it; but Madame is highly musical. She told me that they were giving the workmen and middle-class folk on their Sunday outing first-rate music that evening: Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, and Liszt. But I am like the illustrious Kant who could barely distinguish good music from bad. What he liked was the good, strong, military kind.

" If you want to hear a concert like that in Paris, performed by as large and skilful an orchestra, you must disburse at least twenty francs. In Berlin the whole thing, beer and sausages combined, only cost five marks, and I have rarely eaten such savoury sausages and smoked ham or drunk such fresh, frothy, enticing beer. There was no service, and no tipping, but every one took a ticket and went to a counter where he got a basket containing his meal and a paper napkin. When you had done, you took back your basket and plates to the counter and were returned part of your money. Nothing could be more economical or more practical. What a pity that our French workmen have not similar establishments to go to on Sundays. Only would they care much for Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner? As far as music goes, I think they probably share the tastes of Kant and of your humble servant for the good, strong, military kind.

"We went to Potsdam also. The Germans are very proud of Potsdam, and put it above Versailles; and for their Saint-Cloud they have Charlottenburg."

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THE FLAG GAME

"A slight mishap occurred to us at Potsdam. The day we went, the museums and the palaces were for some reason or other shut. Nothing is so disconcerting as Prussian ways and customs. Madame entered into conversation with the sentry, who was extremely flattered by talking to so well-dressed a lady. And this in Prussia at the palace door of the dreaded Fritz! In France the *pioupiou*[1] on guard would have met us with a: 'Pass along there!' Here a foreign lady converses with the sentinel. She asks him what part of the country he comes from. Is the service hard? Won't he just accept—? In two minutes they were the best friends in the world and, confidence leading to confidence, soon came to questions of State. Close by the big official door guarded by the sentry another little one was half concealed, by which it was possible to slip into the palace. The man explained in great detail how we should seduce the concierge. Thus, thanks to the soldier on guard, we two French people walked straight through the orders for the day.

"In the chapel, which is really beautiful, Madame felt greatly upset. There, from the vault

[1] The equivalent of our "Tommy."—J. P.

above the tomb of Frederick with the Prussian eagle on it, sadly hang innumerable French flags taken during the wars of the Empire and in '70. Torn, pierced with bullets, black with powder, they still bear their regimental numbers. Some have nothing but their staffs, surmounted by the imperial eagle. This martial display affected Madame to the point of tears, and I had much trouble in restoring her good humour:

"'Well,' said I, 'and what about the Invalides? Yes, the Invalides! There you can see nearly as many German flags as French here. Whatever colour they may be, they are like cards in a card-game. One wins, the other loses. If no one lost, no one would win. The fact is that this game is like all games of chance: nations are ruined by it. By winning, you lose; by losing, you win. And in the end you are the same Jack-pudding you were before. And to think that for thousands of years men play this dreary flag game!"

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THE SACRIFICE OF THE "STEW"

"As we came out of the chapel we passed a fatigue party in the courtyard carrying the Sunday 'stew.' They were in undress, jolly, happy, and looked as peaceful as possible. The stew was cooked to perfection and exhaled a most appetizing odour. You know, a soldier's stew, in Germany as well as in France, is a divine dish if it's well cooked. Suddenly, as our men were going towards the mess, bearing aloft their delicious dish of

mutton on a stretcher like some shrine, appeared a great lanky officer such as Caran d'Ache depicts, busby, shabrack, panther skin, leather breeches and all. A field marshal, it seems. In one second our peaceful soldiers had dropped the stew and were doing the goose-step so that the sparks flew from the paving-stones under the nails of their boots!

"I said to Madame:

"'Now I am alarmed. If there is a war with Germany, we are lost.'

"'And why, pray?'

"'Why? You can ask me, why? You have eyes for nothing then. The most significant omens escape you. Do you think that any soldiers could be found in France who would drop a 'stew,' cooked like that, to salute the Archangel Michael himself with his wings of gold?'"

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THE FUTURE CITY

"How dismal the perfect state of society for which we sigh will be! Don't talk to me of the city of God, where there will be no antique shops or booksellers or print dealers. I tell you the ideal will be always a little Paris shop on the left bank of the Seine. You go there in the evening, when your day is done, to linger over the bargains. Perhaps you leave a few louis there. You'll always find something worth while. The owner of the shop knows his business and his talk is full of interest. The little lady of the shop is often attractive. And sometimes you can add her too to your collection

when she comes, one morning, to bring you the curio you have bought."

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I AM M. INGRES

"One evening I was at the Théâtre Italien in the Place Ventadour. The curtain had been up some time when a little man entered, looking for a seat, but they were all full. Then he came to me, tapped me on the shoulder, and said:

"'Give me your place, young man. I am M. Ingres.'

"I rose and bowed to him with deep emotion, and all the evening remained standing by his side in ecstasy."

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MULTIPLICATION

It is New Year's Eve, and he is buying some drawings and old engravings, over which he bargains, indeed haggles. He explains:

"You know I don't want things of remarkable beauty, but something rather striking. It is for friends."

With a malicious smile the lady of the shop remarks that Anatole France need only send his card with a mediocre drawing for it to take on incontinently an unexpected lustre.

"Just so. Very true. Show me your box of fakes."

He chooses some, of which the dearest is not more than fifty francs, and gives the addresses to which these masterpieces are to be sent.

"As they are presents," says the woman, "I will scratch out the prices."

"No, no," replies Anatole France, "add one or two noughts."

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IMPORTUNATE AND INOPPORTUNE

Josephine breaks into the middle of the conversation armed with an enormous feather brush.

"Ah, what an inopportune creature," he sighs.

Josephine overhears and returns, brandishing her war-like feathers.

"If I am importunate," she barks, "I can easily take myself off!"

Anatole France replies gently:

"I did not say importunate, my good soul, but inopportune. There is all the difference between them."

"Ah, all right, then," says Josephine tranquillized.

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WHAT OUGHT I TO HAVE DONE?

"Give me your opinion. Did I behave yesterday like a raw novice? The lady in question is still alluring. Time was when she made some stir, but now she has retired from the lists of literature. We were alone, deliciously alone; the lamp was discreetly shaded, and we had reached the stage of confidences. 'She had not been as happy as people supposed. Her marriage was a mere sham. Children are so ungrateful. As soon as they are of an age to make love, they imagine that their

fathers, and still more their mothers, are only fit for the scrap heap. And they make love so awkwardly, so hesitatingly! Ah, some one was indeed needed to preserve the good traditions!' All of which was punctuated by deep sighs.

"The while she groaned, the lady made tea, filled cups, poured out milk, crumbled her cake. Her confidences became more and more burning. We were seated together on the same little couch, when suddenly—the electric light went out! The room remained lit by the ruddy glow from the hearth. But the lady did not budge. Indeed far from being alarmed by the lamp's treachery she seemed to be expecting something. Probably it was she who, without my noticing, had turned it out. 'How tiresome!' she said, but with a soft, cooing voice. I was terrified and remained like a stone image on my cushion with the sensation of a trap laid in the darkness. I touched a switch and, thanks be to God! the light came on.

"'Good-bye, Monsieur France,' said the lady to me dryly. 'You seem very preoccupied this evening. You don't hear a word that is said to you. No doubt your head is full of some article.'

"With that she almost put me out of the door. But tell me, my friend, what ought I to have done? Wasn't it for her to begin?"

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THE BUDDHA

He has bought a Buddha from a curio-dealer and all the morning looks for a place where to put

the god. First he puts it on the top of a chest, in the drawing-room between two Chinese pots. Then he reflects that the god will be ill at ease in this room where a life-size Florentine Madonna in vivid colours presides on a dais.

He carries the Buddha off and places him on the cowl over the mantelpiece in the dining-room. He is delighted with the result. "That splash of gold," he says, "looks admirable against the brown stone." But on reflection it is not so admirable after all. The idol's colouring is too rich, and besides the room is entirely Middle Ages with its coffers and chests and church sideboards. And before the eighteenth century grotesque figures were hardly ever used in the decoration of rooms.

"My Buddha is an anachronism here. He reminds me of a delightful priest who showed us over his church in Normandy. It was a charming fourteenth-century Gothic church, but in the choir was a pompous Louis XIV altar of Languedoc marble. The priest kept on saying: 'The altar is an anachronism, but it is a delicious anachronism.' I might say the same of my Buddha. It would be deliciously exotic in my dining-room. Still one can't bring a god into the dining-room, especially before being well acquainted with his psychology. We know what our own gods are capable of, and many of them have been dethroned and are therefore powerless. But Buddha is in the full swing of his power. Of all the divinities he must, I think, be the one who enjoys most credit on earth, if not

in heaven, and counts the greatest number of the faithful!"

So he takes down the Buddha.

"I shall put him in my bedroom. What better place could I find? He will protect me."

The idol is placed on the little writing-desk between the fireplace and the window.

At this point in comes Madame.

"What an extraordinary idea, to buy that Buddha! You found it in a bazaar, I suppose? It is absolutely without style. So you are going in for pagodas now? Your Buddha is a fake. Lift it up and see how light it is. It's made of poplar wood, and is of rubbishy Italian manufacture. All you need now is to buy a paper parasol and a few lanterns to have a complete replica of a demi-mondaine's orientalism. You really bought your Buddha at a curio-dealer's? And paid heavily for it too? How clever of you to go off poking about in shops by yourself! If you had asked me to go with you, I should have saved you from such an absurdity: for I am very well up in Buddhas, whereas you seem to me something of a greenhorn. There is a whole department of Buddhas like that at the Bon Marché."

The Master defends his Buddha: "It's a unique specimen. There is one like it at the Guimet Museum."

The next day he says to me: "I have given you virgins and saints; but you have no Buddha.

That is inadmissible. A respectable man cannot be without a Buddha. Take this one."

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THE FOOT OF ENGLAND

"Yes, England has a foot. The other day I was crossing the Parc Monceau when I saw a poor dung beetle lying on its back and trying to get upon its feet. I held out my succouring umbrella to it, and the brilliant-hued creature was already making for the nearest green patch when suddenly an Englishwoman made her appearance in the path. How did I recognize her nationality? Everything proclaimed it: her mannish figure, her strangely coloured hair, her vinous complexion, and her teeth like the keyboard of a piano—her whole chapter of blemishes! When an Englishwoman starts out to be ugly, she doesn't stop halfway, you know. 'Englishwomen have two left arms,' said your fellow Provençal, Rivarol. Quite true. And yet, when they are beautiful——! Then, my friend, they are Venuses. Well, my Englishwoman was a real caricature. Her nose stuck in a Baedeker, she marched like a hussar on parade. Down came her foot—and what a foot!—on my unlucky beetle. I thought of India and of Egypt!"

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TRADITION AND SOAP

"Traditionalism is Maurras' hobby. It's a mania with him. He will prove you are a traditionalist without your knowing anything about it.

What could be simpler? For instance he will ask you agreeably:

"'Tell me, do you wash?'

"'Of course I do, like everybody else.'

"'Like everybody else! That's not much. Well, anyway, you wash. You admit the principle. And how do you wash?'

"'I take a piece of soap——'

"'One moment. Why do you take a piece of soap? Not every one uses soap. In Africa for instance millions of men never use soap. Soap is a comparatively recent invention.'

"'Good heavens, I use soap just as my father used it, and his father and grandfather——'

"'There you are. You see, you are traditionalist; therefore, a royalist.'"

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THE TWO HANDS

His admirers have begged him to have a cast taken of his right hand, the hand that penned *Thais* and *Cranquebille.* He agreed, and the other morning an Italian expert came by appointment.

"I feel that I am becoming God," said he, while the man was moulding the plaster round the illustrious dexter.

To-day the expert has brought a beautiful bronze cast. The author amuses himself by putting it on his writing table side by side with an antique marble hand brought back from Rome,

and comparing them. The Roman fragment serves him as the basis for building up a veritable novel.

"There can be no doubt about it: it is the hand of an emperor. Look at this line between the forefinger and the thumb, where you can still see the mark of a brace. What was it that this hand held? The roll of a speech, or some official act? Or the wand, the baton of command?"

He returns to his own hand.

"Now mine has never held, for baton, anything but the pen."

He put down the bronze hand and takes up the marble again.

"How elegant it is! It might almost be a woman's hand. It must be the hand of Cæsar. You know that, in a certain essential point, Cæsar was somewhat Greek. What of that? It was the way with antiquity! What has that hand caressed, or rather the hand of which this marble keeps the imperious, perverted form? It has embraced, commanded, written. That was the golden age of literature. In Cæsar's time writing was not a trade but was cultivated by statesmen and great captains. To-day we had best not speak about literature in connexion with generals and politicians."

He turns over the hand.

"The palm is furrowed with characteristic lines. To my regret I do not understand chiromancy, but I know a lady who reads palms as you do the newspaper; I will get her to read this hand.

There can be no doubt whatever that it is the hand of an emperor. It is the hand of a general, a man of action, a writer; in short, the hand of Cæsar. It must have been broken after the murder, or perhaps when the Christian anarchists like Polyeucte pillaged the basilicas."

His tone changes and grows mocking.

"See how far the sheen of this marble has led me! And there are learned critics who deny that I have imagination! I got this hand—I can tell everything to you, my friend—from a filthy Roman beggar, and the gods alone know how magnificently filthy Roman beggars can be! This one looked like Silenus. He was snub-nosed, and wall-eyed; his forehead was horned, his beard proclaimed the blackguard, and he stank of wine. He used to hang round the museums on the look-out for tourists, and when he found one who looked like a connoisseur, approached with an air of the deepest mystery and offered him fragments of antiques. Then the next morning he would bring Cæsar's hand or Venus' foot to your hotel.

"'But where is your Olympus, my good man?'

"'That's my secret, signor. I know of treasures hidden away among the vines. I shall go there to-night to work for you.'

"So I obtained, very cheap too, this hand and several other interesting fragments from Silenus, turned ghoul among the antiques. Did he really go to the vines? Or did the vines rather go to his

head? I am going to make a confession—you won't denounce me?—but I greatly fear that I am a receiver of stolen goods. Silenus probably broke off pieces of statues in the museums, which are as badly looked after in Italy as in France. Most likely the sacrilegious criminal, to get drunk on thin wine, mutilated lovely antiques that had been respected by time, always less cruel than man. But then, the harm was done. All that I could do was to give pious asylum to the glorious debris. Moreover, I have the custom-house receipt, authorizing me to take these morsels of statues out of Italy. It is true, the permit came to me in a somewhat unorthodox way, thanks to a little holy oil; for on the other side of the Alps oil, in the shape of a few coins, renders all palms holy. Thus I am absolved in the sight of men, if not in the sight of God."

A visitor enters.

"We were comparing," says Anatole France, "the hand of Julius Cæsar with that of your humble servant. You shall judge yourself which of the two is the more imperial."

And he puts the two hands into those of the astonished visitor.

After some hesitation the latter proclaims the supremacy of Anatole's hand over that of Cæsar. "It's obvious," he says. "From what is it obvious?" asks France.

"There, Master. Do you see that enlargement of the joint of the forefinger? That is the sign of

literary genius. The same stigma is found on Victor Hugo's hand."

"Where do you say you find the sign of literary genius?" says Anatole France examining his hand in the flesh.

"There, Master," points out the flatterer.

"There? That's a chilblain, my friend."

The other falls back on equally evident characteristics.

"I have never in my whole life—and I have examined goodness knows how many hands—I have never seen so youthful a hand as yours."

Monsieur Bergeret turns the conversation. He puts back the marble hand and the bronze hand on his desk. Now he is talking of the fortifications of Paris, which there is talk of demolishing.

"An excellent idea," remarks the flatterer. "They are so old."

"So old!" mutters France. "They date from '44. They are exactly as old as I am, and my hand."

General laughter, and exit the flatterer.

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A RECORD

At table Madame sings the praises of Edmund Rostand. Anatole France listens in silence and rages while he eats. At the end, as he wipes his lips and his beard, he lets fall:

"Rostand! Rostand! He has the incontestable glory—incontestable, I repeat—of having written the worst verse of the century since Victor Hugo!"

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VENUS AND THE BLACK VIRGIN

He is going through the case with the Tanagras.

"And you know, they are authentic. They are not made of pipeclay like those belonging to M——. There is a factory of them at Paris, and another at Rome. Do you know what this is?"

"It looks like a mustard-spoon."

"Sacrilegious infant! It is Venus Astarte, one of the most ancient effigies of Venus. This tiny bone that you take for a spatula comes from the excavations at Mycenæ. It was sent me from there by the director of the German mission."

There follows a discussion on the probable age of the amulet, which is so summarily sculptured that you can hardly distinguish anything but the breasts and the thighs: "the essential," remarks Anatole France.

"Perhaps she is several thousand years old; but who can say? It is possible that she is much younger. Imagine for example an archæologist several centuries hence disinterring the celebrated black Virgin of Puy. Most likely he would give its date as the eleventh or twelfth century. In reality it belongs to the Restoration. The real one, the miraculous Virgin, was burnt by the Jacobins in '93, but another exactly similar was constructed under that Voltairian king, Louis XVIII, and inherited its predecessor's powers of miracle-working.

"Take another example. Who will distinguish in a few years between the genuine and the imita-

tion in the porch of Notre Dame as restored by Viollet-le-Duc? My archaic Venus, my mustard-spoon as you call her, may be the copy of a much older statuette. Doubtless it was some pilgrim's offering: there must have been, round the sanctuary, a whole district like that of Saint-Sulpice. After all, what do I care if she is two, or four, thousand years old!"

He takes an adorable terra-cotta cupid from its glass prison.

"This one is authentic. What marvellously perverse grace! You would say it was one of Raphael's angels. It was presented to me by the Armenians because I presided over a committee to protest against the massacres. They paid five or six thousand francs for it, I believe. It is a unique example. Between ourselves they might have made a better choice. No doubt he is a lovely little boy—too lovely indeed for a boy. I should have preferred a girl. For me, love is a woman: that is a point on which I am not Greek."

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THE NEW PHYSICS AND NEW METAPHYSICS

At table at Madame de ——'s. A conversation with the Abbé M——.

"But, my dear friend, just as in the time of Tiberias, so now there is a religion growing up under our eyes which we do not even suspect. It is generally imagined that the ancient gods were brutally driven from their temples by the new god who installed himself on their altars. That is how

Polyeucte and Christian novels represent it. In reality the transition was far more gentle, so slow indeed that generations did not perceive it. The revolution was accomplished in the temples but, at the same time, in people's minds. Let me explain. First it was the priests who were won over and the new theology, if I may say so, filtered into the old. New rites were grafted on to the official rites, or were superimposed on them. At the present moment the Catholic religion, of which you, my dear Abbé, are an honour and a light, exists no more. In vain you will point me to the multiplicity and wealth of the churches, and to the ardour of the faithful. These faithful are infidels. Not one of them maintains your dogma in its integrity. The best and most devout among them are those who think the least about it. They are Catholics through ignorance. But the others, the learned, like yourself, Abbé? Together round this friendly table and talking freely and in confidence, you will I am sure admit that your belief is not that of your chambermaid. Your ideas on eternity, hell, and purgatory are not the same as those entertained by a serving wench of forty years. Some ceremonies, as, for example, the baptism of church bells, make you smile. You admit the infallibility of the pope, but with so many reservations that his infallibility becomes illusory. You do not believe you are damned because you discover interpolations or nonsense in holy writ. You consider, as you once told me, that the doctrine of the Immacu-

late Conception is hardly fitted to our scientific age. It was imperative—and I agree with you—to promulgate such a dogma at the height of the Middle Ages. But to-day, in the time of Pasteur and Berthelot! Well, my dear Abbé, you, who are so devout and are the luminary of your parish, you are a Protestant. Without your being aware of it, of course. Don't attempt to deny it; the whole of the Holy Roman Church is so with you. The preachers of to-day don't preach any longer in the pulpit; they plead, they devote themselves to apologetics and exegetics. What imprudence on their part! I have often conversed with devout persons such as nuns and simple coutry folk, and I have always found them impregnated with this fatal spirit of criticism. Every one chips away at the Church's dogma till he has what suits him. Every one carves his own little religion out of Religion, builds his own little chapel in the cathedral, and has his own particular saint and his own system of piety. But the great truths are either not thought of or else whittled away to enable them to be swallowed. How many sacraments are there? Seven. Are you quite sure, my dear Abbé? Ask a man of my age the date of his first Communion, and he will answer approximately: 'It was in such and such a year. In May probably, because there were roses on the altar. We had to do a week's preparation and on the eve I went on my knees and asked pardon for all my crimes from papa and mamma and the servants. I wore an armlet with a

silk fringe, and my aunt Honorine gave me my cross. My neighbour at the Holy Table was Mayeux, you know, Mayeux who plays at the Châtelet.' But he will remember very little of the eucharistic fish, though the sauce of the vain details is fresh enough in his mind. No matter: that is a sacrament and a popular sacrament. But ask the same man about Confirmation. Compared with his silence on this point, his memories of the first Communion were eloquence itself. He knows that he was confirmed, like everybody else. But when, and by what bishop, and what impressions he received from the ceremony, is a blank. Yet the occasion is important, for it is one of the sacraments that a man receives but once in his life. So you see, Abbé, we are on the way to lose a sacrament, without even being aware of our loss. Thus were lost all the sacraments of antiquity, not, as we are told, at one stroke, but insensibly. You are a confessor, my dear Abbé, and I know that your confessional is the most sought after in all the parish, and rightly so. Without question, if I felt myself driven by the irresistible wind of grace, it is to you that I should address myself. But, between ourselves, you do not confess as priests did in the time of Vincent de Paul, Gondrin, or Bérulle. You would not venture to put the questions that they so sanctimoniously did to persons of the fair sex. It would no longer be seemly, and you would catch it hot from your penitents, if you will pardon the expression. You are less inquisitive than your predecessors. But that is not the

main difference between you and them: it is that you are more sceptical. Why should you ask about what you are sure of? Why should you dwell on sins that have become as our daily bread? Do you really insist on a pledge never to begin again? You see, you are laughing! But your fair sinners would laugh much more. No, no, you are no longer confessors: you are something better—directors of conscience, and guides in morals. Your penitents no longer bring you those old gamey collections of fat sins, but their small fry of peccadillos and their confidences. That is the main point nowadays: the confidences, which in their turn beget other confidences. The dread sacrament has become an intimate, emotional conversation. What country priest, even, would now refuse absolution? He would know much better, for he knows that people do very well without it.

"And Hell! Do you speak much of that? I know well, Abbé, that you do not deny the existence of Hell; only you believe that there is no one in it.

"How then can you charge the Protestants with changing their doctrine? You yourselves, Roman Catholics, are flexibility itself. That indeed is what has so far made your strength: you have had the suppleness to adapt yourselves to every socal transformation. Metaphysics moreover is bound up with physics. The ruin of St. Thomas Aquinas' theology and Aristotle's philosophy at the Renaissance was due to the invention of printing, which set books in opposition to the Book. But it was also

due to the discovery of the new world, the invention of spectacles, the microscope, and the telescope, and to the realization of the existence of the infinitely great and the infinitely small, of new spaces, new earths, and new heavens. The new science of physics killed the old metaphysics.

"The same thing is happening now under our eyes without our perhaps realizing the immense revolution that is going on. The Church must absorb electricity and X-rays and hypnotism, or she must die. She must have a new system of metaphysics as well as new men of light and leading. With great difficulty she keeps alight on her altars the liturgical candles that salesmen assure you are made of pure beeswax, and nevertheless we retain a suspicion that they are made of composition. We are no longer in the pleasant time of Virgil: men of science have taught how honey may be manufactured. Are not wax and composition both one, from the point of view of chemistry? Let us then immerse ourselves in archæological traditionalism, and become amateurs of pious archaism. Who can perceive the light of your apostolic candles in chapels refulgent with electric light? They have become useless. A day will perhaps come when the officiating priest will no longer be able to read anything by their light, any more than he could decipher a single page of his missal, now that his eyes are accustomed to a more intense light, by the aid of one of those ancient boat-shaped lamps found in the catacombs. The same phenomenon is taking

place in men's minds. Think too of the guardian light of the sanctuary, the tiny spark that replaces the presence of the vestal before the tabernacle. Why should its smelly oil not be replaced by the most precious and mysterious of our metals? By a speck of radium."

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METAGROBOLISM

"Before I leave," he says to me, "I want to pay you a visit. I shall come to-morrow at two o'clock and see how you are getting on. We will have a talk about the Maid."

Next day, punctually at two, he is with me. He is delighted with the neighbourhood, and with my flat and with my furniture.

"How happy you are!" he says, as he looks over my curios and engravings. "You have everything arranged according to your taste. I had to wait till I was fifty before I had surroundings like yours."

I reply that my rooms are far from equalling his in picturesque splendour: his house is a veritable museum.

"It is true," he answers. "The Villa Said has a distinct resemblance to Dr. Faust's laboratory. I have been at pains to hang some stuffed crocodiles from the ceiling. But I am far from liking all the weird objects with which I have surrounded myself. My taste, as you know, is rather for the eighteenth century and the Consulate. But Madame has taken those two epochs for herself, so,

in order to have peace, I have fallen back on the Middle Ages. When we go to look at antiques it is agreed that Louis XV and Louis XVI are reserved for her, and the saints, virgins, and mediæval reliquaries for me. I do not precisely desire Madame's death, but I begin to have my fill of ecclesiastical bric-à-brac.

"You too, I see, are attracted by the Middle Ages, and here are some old acquaintances of mine —these statues and reliquaries that I gave you. You are right to decorate your flat in the Victor Hugo style, for men of letters, just like doctors and dentists, need some credit and consideration. That is the explanation of my crocodiles: we need a little metagrobolism."

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THE GOLD BULL'S-EYE

I had brought back a number of curios after a fortnight's stay in Languedoc. Among them is one of those antique watches like bull's-eyes. Anatole France handles the ball of gold and polished enamel with delight. He makes its cracked chimes strike and praises the graceful works that look like a miniature turnspit. I offer it to him, warning him at the same time that as a watch the pretty trinket is most inaccurate and capricious, going its own way without reference to sun or almanac. Sometimes it grows drowsy and then its hours are interminable. And again to make up the lost time it will rush feverishly ahead and

achieve a whole revolution of the dial in forty minutes.

"So much the better, my friend, if it is inaccurate. That is the reason why I will accept it. Could you imagine me making room in my fob, close to my heart, for a strict, tyrannical, and unimaginative piece of mechanism? An unpunctual man must have an unpunctual watch, and this shall henceforth be my triumphant alibi. When I arrive late at Madame's, to appease her wrath, I shall draw out my golden bull's-eye; and it will receive the storm."

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EXAMINATIONS

"If I were an examiner—which heaven forfend!—I should not take much stock of the candidate's knowledge. What can a youth of sixteen be expected to know? Either he gabbles, like a parrot, things that he does not understand, or he talks out of his head. Imagine the case vice versâ, and the examiner having the same questions put him instead of to the examinee! No: if I had to pass or reject a candidate, I should not go upon the correctness of his replies, but upon his general appearance. I should take note whether his physiognomy was more or less pleasing, and consider the generosity of his facial angle, the brightness of his eye, and the timbre of his voice. I should engage him in a little conversation without any pretensions to strict science. I should not say to myself: 'Can this youth tell me without hesitation

the phases of the Thirty Years' War or the laws of Solon?' I should say to myself: 'You have a marriageable daughter. Would you give her to this young man?' That is the true touchstone."

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A LESSON IN MATHEMATICS

"Who is your neighbour?"

"A school-mistress."

"So much the worse for you. Who does for you?"

"The concierge."

"Has she any children?"

"Yes, two girls."

"How old are they?"

"Sixteen and nineteen."

"Aha! Good young men always have luck. Are they pretty?"

"That depends on the day and the moment."

"A good answer, though somewhat conceited. You speak like a sultan and like a sage. The beauty of our misses varies as the eyes with which you regard them. It depends but on you, happy graduate of Montpellier, that they should outstrip Venus in grace and charm the whole year round. But you are too good a fellow to wish it. Besides women do not need always to be beautiful: it is enough that they should have flashes that dazzle and blind. Once blinded, you have to follow. But how do these damsels of the cord[1] earn their bread?"

[1] The cord with which the concierge opens the house door at night.—J. P.

"The elder is a telephone operator. Their father, who is dead, was a postman. The younger is going up for her examination for the post-office, and her mother has asked me to give her lessons."

"Oh, excellent mother! How thoughtful and foreseeing! And lessons in what, my son?"

"In mathematics."

"Good. Of course you know nothing at all about mathematics, but what matter? It is easier to be a good teacher than a good pupil. And what is your salary? Ah, now I am indiscreet. Oh, the cunning fellow and his secrets! He reveals the mysteries of rule of three and interest to his concierge's daughters! He stuffs their head with myriagrammes and hectolitres and kilometres and décastères—and says nothing about it to his old Master! I could give them lessons in mathematics too, being as ignorant as you on the subject; and I would ask the same price for my lessons. See how modest I am—or should I say, ambitious? So I have found out all about it! Well, bring these young persons to me one morning. You're not jealous, I hope, of an old man? I might be able to do them a good turn. I will recommend them both to my friend Barthou. That will give you more leisure for your lessons. With the minister's recommendation your pupil will triumph and you will share her laurels. Is she fair or dark?"

"Dark."

"Thin or plump?"

"Neither the one nor the other."

"Well, well, enough of this. This is not the maid for whom I came here. She has no need of me. I came to this far-off and agreeable part of the town for the Maid of Orleans, that blessed girl who gives me such infernal worry."

He looks over the books of reference for his Joan of Arc, and is astonished at their number, size, and weight. The fact is that they form a goodly library. He asks me:

"Are you quite sure that I have read all that?"

"Certainly, and many more works besides. See: they are marked at the foot of the page."

* * * * *

FAME

He sits down and continues sipping a glass of lemonade the while:

"I would willingly be in your shoes, but would you consent to change?"

I signify Yes, with enthusiasm.

"You wouldn't gain much."

"You are the most illustrious of our writers, and the most popular man in France."

"Perhaps. But I am sixty-nine and on a diet. Whatever I want, the doctor arrives with his wand, as if I were Sancho in the island of Barataria. I am king; but tobacco, wine, and love are prohibited to me. I am not of course prohibited from writing books, which would perhaps be the sole reasonable prescription. Look you, my young friend, enjoy love while you may. By night, by day, in winter, and in summer! That is why you

are in this world, and all the rest is vanity and smoky deception. There is but one science: love! There is but one wealth: love! There is but one system of politics: love!"

"I adhere with all my heart to your creed, my dear Master. At the same time I beg leave to remark that literary and political ambition greatly facilitates the conjugation of the verb 'to love.' 'Without money,' says the proverb 'no Switzerland.' And no Swiss girl, either."

"True, and that is why I was ambitious. That is why I entered into 'the pact of the towns,'[1] and why I am an academician and an Immortal. Such Immortality is only worth while for its value as a shield. When you have got honours you can afford to disdain them, and the supreme contempt for decorations is to have marvellous ranks in all sorts of puerile national orders, and never to wear them. But you must be ambitious. You must be ambitious and in love. When you are a member of the Institute, like me, you will be able to do exactly as you please. If I were to go to the opera in bedroom slippers and a night-cap instead of a dress-coat and a top-hat, what box-keeper is there who would not bow before the caprice of one of the Forty? What would pass for wildly extravagant

[1] The allusion is to Alfred de Vigny's poem "La Mort du Loup:"

Mais son devoir était de les sauver, a fin
De pouvoir apprendre à bien souffrir la faim,
A ne jamais entrer dans le pacte des villes
Que l'homme a fait avec les animaux serviles.

—J. P.

behaviour in an ordinary mortal and get him locked up in an asylum, would be counted in me an interesting novelty and a mark of good fellowship. No one would say: 'Anatole France is off his head! He has come to the opera in a night-cap.' No: they would recall Jean Jacques and his Armenian bonnet, and would consider me charming or impudent."

He is enchanted with the quiet of my rooms.

"You have, my young friend, the greatest possession of all, and the most radiant and lovely of mistresses: peace. Now I lived like a slave until I had reached maturity. First I was the slave of the blind and anxious tenderness of my parents. Then I married, and I knew what hell is like after the sacrament."

Towards five o'clock we go out. On the way Anatole France looks into the concierge's room, and congratulates her:

"I am delighted with the orderliness that I see in your young tenant's rooms. Ah, how I should like to have a woman like you in my service! You have two daughters, I believe, as fair as they are good. I have told Brousson to bring them to me one morning. I should be very happy to know them, and I will recommend them to the minister. They deserve it. Good-bye, and take good care of my secretary. Your servant, madam, your servant."

He leaves the concierge in an ecstasy.

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HOT CHESTNUTS

We are at the Pantheon.

"On this spot," relates Anatole France, "I saw the first shell fall during the siege in '70. The murderous fireworks were a perfect joy to all the urchins. When a shell burst every brat in the district rushed to pick up the fragments. The little chaps offered you the still burning pieces, blowing on their fingers and calling out: 'Chestnuts! Hot chestnuts!' It was impossible not to admire the truly antique courage of these street arabs. They sold the fragments for two sous apiece, and one can't say it was dear, considering that they risked their lives to pick them up.

"I have a peculiar affection for this part of the town. During part of my youth I lived here. I was very poor. My father had cast me off because I wrote poetry. The poor man had the idea, very strange in a man who sold books, that to write them was shameful and dangerous. To sell them was a possible trade; but where could writing them lead save to prison or a lunatic asylum? After all the poor man was right: it leads to the Academy.

"At that time I lived in a garret under the roof, no bigger or more comfortable than a swallow's nest. To write, I had to push my little table into the gutter, which was not very convenient on rainy days, so then I worked in my bed. But when it was fine, I saw, as I blackened the paper in my dizzy gutter, the shadows of the birds and

the clouds flit across it. And then I too had charming neighbours, my friend. Ignorant as I was, I gave them lessons. And they gave me lessons also. Their science outstripped mine by far: it was the great science, the science of love. From our bed we could see the cupola, stolen from St. Geneviève to cover the relics of republican saints. Was it the effect of that scenery? I know not, but never have I felt such ardour as then."

* * * * *

NO, NOT THE PANTHEON

I don't know why, but pointing to the Pantheon I said to him:

"It is there, my dear Master, that you will sleep your last sleep, by the side of your great friend Voltaire and your great enemies Jean Jacques and Hugo."

Suddenly his face clouds over and he moves away from me in great ill-humour.

"How cruel of you," says he, "to strew my path with asphodels and everlastings. And how do you know that they will put me there?"

"Zola has been put there."

"You're making epigrams."

"No, no, my dear Master, it is simply a clumsy but sincere expression of my admiration."

"I forgive you, but don't let's speak any more of the Pantheon. Yes, by the way, I shall put everything else aside this evening and write my will. I

shall not turn in without turning out my last wishes. My will shall contain a declaration that I wish to be buried like everyone else in the cemetery of my district, the field of the silent goddess. And I shall add: 'If you must at all costs have a new tenant for the Pantheon, take Brousson! He has genius. He has a genius for clouding the autumn of his old Master's life with ghastly conversation. He excels in strewing everlastings and asphodels on the short road left him."

We go down the Rue Soufflot and stop at a bookshop to buy a Quintilian for twenty-five francs. The price seems to me excessive.

"What, all that money for a declamatory historian, who was Domitian's sycophant?"

"What harm has Domitian done to you?" France shoots out at me. "Did that much defamed emperor not make a good choice when he entrusted the care of his nephews to Quintilian? To be candid, it is for the sake neither of Quintilian nor of Domitian that I have bought the book, but for that of Pogge who dug up the Spanish author's manuscript in the shop of a grocer who was about to wrap up his plums and his dried hake in it. You see: it is the Roman edition, which is rare and valuable. And look at the binding, intact after three centuries and more! The humanist who brought out this edition must have considered Quintilian as his patron saint and that is why he had the Institutions got up like a breviary with metal clasps. It is for these clasps and for the

binding of wooden boards covered with embellished leather that I have given twenty-five francs and not for the Iberian rhetorician. I thought the collector's vanity had left me. I had sworn never again to buy a book for its binding, heraldic tooling, or book-plate. A drunkard's oath! But I must inflict a punishment on myself, and so, my friend, I make you a present of this book with its rich binding. It will be the pearl of your library: you must place it on the shelf of honour, but, contrary to the other books, with its back to the wall and its edges towards the light, so as to show the fine Gothic clasps in all their lustre. That will produce a great impression on people who come to see you. Every trade has a little charlatanism in it: ours has much. You won't read my Quintilian, for you come from a happy part of the world where rhetoric is in the blood and you have no need of recipes for eloquence. But others will admire my book on your shelves. I can hear you telling them: 'It was given me when I was a young man by an old wind-bag who wrote books which to-day moulder in dusty oblivion, even as Quintilian.'"

We make another halt before a bric-à-brac shop at a windy corner near Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre.

"You never can tell," explains Anatole France. "These rags may conceal a pearl. Remember the Donatello in the Thiers collection. One day a connoisseur sitting on the top of an omnibus was

looking with disgust at the mean objects spread out in the mud, near the Porte d'Orleans. Suddenly among the broken bidets, noseless watering-cans, and battered soldiers' hats he spied a plaster statuette that seemed to have a touch of Florentine grace. At the risk of breaking his neck and spraining his ankle he slid down the iron spiral steps and for a few sous became possessor of the statuette. Like all true collectors he turned it over and over, and sniffed it, and caressed it. What astonished him was the weight. As he walked along he chipped at the plaster with his penknife, and to his delighted surprise discovered a magnificent bronze under the whitewash. It was submitted to experts and proved the original by the great Donatello that you may admire in the Thiers collection. It is about the only thing in that little runt's penny gaff that deserves the royal hospitality of the Louvre. But how can the whitewash on the statuette be explained? It can only be supposed that it fell by degrees into the hands of poor folk who thought that all statues must be white. The warm patina of the bronze seemed to them a dirty blemish; and so they gave Donatello a coat of white lead. Who knows, if we look well through this rubbish, that we too shan't find a Donatello?"

For masterpiece all that we unearth is a leaning tower of Pisa in alabaster. The Master grows quite pathetic over the knick-knack:

"Doubtless it is a souvenir of a honeymoon spent in Italy—legitimate, or illegitimate. The

one sure thing is that, like the tower, this noble love, whether wedded or adulterous, has leaned considerably since, for us to find the votive offering at the old-clothesman's."

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THORNS TO THE LIVING, ROSES TO THE DEAD

We have reached the Luxembourg garden.

"I am fond of these lawns and avenues," confides Anatole France to me. "When I was librarian at the Senate here, the palace where it sat was to me as school and 'prep' and poenas to a boy. The Luxembourg garden was my recreation ground—a ground full of roses! How often, waiting for the end of the sittings when I should escape from the library, did I wish our conscript fathers at the devil! These Gérontes, mumbling away their laws, were of exceedingly small interest compared to the little mites outside building fairy sand castles round the fountain. What eloquence, I should like to know, is worth the fair breast of a nurse offered like some fruit to an infant's mouth under the flowering oleanders?"

"Here is one of your friends," I said, pointing to the statue of Lecomte de Lisle in the midst of one of the lawns.

"How horrible! How disgusting! Between ourselves Lecomte de Lisle was not my friend: far from it. He was my colleague at the Senate library, nothing more."

"He was a great poet."

"Possibly. But I have never known a stu-

pider, vainer, more ignorant man. A translator of Homer who didn't know a word of Greek! To perpetrate the harshest verses of the century he was forced to have recourse to Latin or French translations, so that he wholly missed direct contact with the noble Greek form. He was a savage got up in Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. His cunning and his ability consisted in disguising the Homeric heroes like wrestlers at a fair or the men who swallow burning swabs of petrol and eat glass.

"Add to these absurdities an abominable temper. Lecomte de Lisle's ingenuity was exclusively devoted to abuse and his sole talent was in renewing his ill-humour. I am happy to see him petrified like that: he is ridiculous to all eternity."

"Master! Master! One day perhaps, many years hence I trust, another monument will be put up to another librarian of the Senate, and people will look open-mouthed at the bust of the author of *Thais,* hoisted up on to a cube of stone. Maybe they will go so far as to sculpt you life-size in a Roman toga or romantic draperies——"

"Enough, enough! You poison my life with your imaginings."

"And by the side of the imposing marble statue will be a beautiful woman in bronze——"

"Ah, I breathe again. If there is a beautiful woman, I consent to spend eternity on my column. Oh, I shall be very, very good!"

"A beautiful allegorical figure, like that by

your colleague Lecomte de Lisle, with quivering wings——"

"No, no: no quivering wings! I don't like winged women. I have never met any, and don't know how to take them. What is more, I have a horror of modern allegories, which are commonly the acme of insipid imbecility. You are an ungrateful young scamp, and I have a good mind to take back the fine Quintilian of which I have deprived myself for your sake. A minute ago this walk through terraces and avenues and rose-trees, with children and dancing fountains and cooing pigeons round us, seemed to me a Paradise. Now you have breathed on it with your impertinent breath; and the lovely park is stripped bare of flowers and become a cemetery, in which I see nothing but this funereal monument that you describe with such perverse obstinacy."

A short pause. He chews the points of his moustache.

"I shall not escape the monument, of course. Sculptors must live. It will cost a great deal of money and be very ugly, and it will take up a great deal of room. Now, why can't they give me the money straight away? Am I mad! The thorns are offered to the living, and the roses to the dead."

* * * * *

BALZAC

Madame is unwell and keeps her room. She wants to be read to; but what? I suggest Balzac. France declares that Balzac has overstepped the bounds of common sense.

"I do not like obese authors—obese, figuratively speaking. Balzac terrifies me. He is fat, heavy, perspiring, confused, and vulgar. He delights in political tirades and puns: he is in fact the illustrious Gaudissart! He is a commercial traveller of genius, and is often inferior to Sandeau. But when he is good, he is not a novelist but a historian. The whole of contemporary history is to be found in his work."

Madame defends Balzac but with little enthusiasm. Finally the choice falls on Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe*. I read the celebrated passage:

"My mother gave birth at St. Malo to a first son who died in the cradle. The house that my parents lived in then is in a narrow, dark street in St. Malo, called the street of the Jews. The room where my mother was confined looks over a deserted part of the town walls. From the windows of the room you can see the sea breaking on the rocks as far as the very horizon. I was scarcely alive when I came into the world. The roar of the waves, whipped by a squall that foretold the autumn equinox, drowned my cries. I have often had these details related to me, and their sadness has never been effaced from my memory. No day passes when, dreaming of what I have been, I do not see in my mind's eye the rock on which I was born, the room where my mother inflicted life on me, and the tempest whose tumult was the lullaby to my first sleep. Heaven seemed

to have combined these various circumstances to place in my cradle an image of my destiny."

Here Anatole France breaks out:

"What a family! Mme. de Chateaubriand could not have her confinement like any ordinary woman. She must have the sea, the lightning, and the storm. In the birth of common mortals the waters burst: the infant Chateaubriand must needs have the ocean. These folk have no idea of simplicity."

"Enough," begs Madame from her bed. "You are cruelty personified. The romantic purr of the words was just beginning to get hold of me, and you must needs tear Chateaubriand to pieces in his cradle. What has the poor babe done to you? Wait to attack him till he is big and let him be suckled in peace."

"I have a horror of Chateaubriand. His declamatory eloquence poisoned my youth. My good father idolized the viscount. He used to keep all the incomplete copies of the *Génie du Chirstianisme* and the *Itinéraire* piled up in his bedroom as his bedside books, and read them too, till he knew them by heart. By dint of studying the viscount he ended by catching his trick of stupendous specifying. If an omelette was too much or not enough set, or a cutlet grilled too long, he would fall on my poor mother in the style of M. de Chateaubriand descending from Mt. Sinai. I don't know how many portraits he had of his idol: at least a boxful. He compelled me, for his pleas-

ure, to read out loud the most pompous passages of his favourite author. There was one in particular of which he never tired: a piece about the procession that is the flattest bit of rhapsody imaginable.

"My first prize at school, moreover, was this devilish *Génie du Christianisme*. Do you wonder now that I have a disgust for it? But I had a fine revenge upon the viscount."

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CHATEAUBRIAND'S INKSTAND

"When I left Stanislas, the masters there persuaded my father that I should never do anything worth while, and that my gifts, not only for a career of letters but for any liberal career, were nil. There was talk of putting me into my father's business. I spent more than a year in cataloguing the books. It was a task I did not dislike, and I am far from having an unpleasant recollection of this subordinate work. Even to-day, the morning after some little spree, when I feel my head empty, nothing is so agreeable or refreshing as to plunge into cataloguing.

"But to come back to the viscount. A rich customer of my father's, who had a château near the Orne, asked him one day to recommend some one acquainted with old books to catalogue his opulent library.

"'My son will do what you want,' said my father.

"So off I went to the château and was very

courteously welcomed there. As he was settling me into the library, the master of the house said:

"'Look well at that inkstand, young man, for it was a very great man who dipped his pen in it.'

"Roll my eyes as I might, I could distinguish nothing so marvellous about the inkstand. It was one of those dreadful inkstands, carved from pine-wood, that tourists bring back from Switzerland. You know the style. It was in the shape of a steep rock with pines sticking up round it; two stags gambolled on the summit, while another pair slaked their thirst at the pots for the ink and the sand. Similar picturesque atrocities are still to be found in bazaars in small provincial towns. You should have seen how this treasure was handled by its owner—it might have been the Holy Sacrament.

"'Take great care of it, young man,' he enjoined me. 'It is the inkstand of M. de Chateaubriand, the very one he had at the Vallée au Loup. I had it from . . .'

"Obviously he would have given all the books in his magnificent collection for this frightful bit of rubbish.

"Catastrophe followed swiftly. The owner of of the relic went away, and I climbed upon the library steps to explore the shelves. There is nothing so amusing, you know, as this hunt for rare books tucked cunningly away in a corner between two insignificant volumes. I was in the midst of examining various editions and was fairly intoxicated with good historic dust when—bang! Over

went the steps with a lurch and I tumbled amid a pile of books on to the precious inkstand. I extricated myself with nothing worse than a few scratches; but the Vicomte de Chateaubriand's inkstand was in sad case. One of the stags had his legs broken, another had lost his antlers, and the hermit his beard. When I realized the catastrophe I was in a mortal fear of what the jealous lord of the house would say. I should be taken for a vandal. Trembling lest some one should come, I explored the floor on all fours. Joy! Here was the stag's haunch and the hind's antler. Only the hermit's beard was missing. Victory! I had it. Forthwith, gum in hand—ordinary gum for sticking in bookplates—I began to patch the fearful object, and with the aid of a match, a bit of string, a drawing-pin, and some wafers I fitted a sort of splint on the animal's leg. Then, to give the gum time to dry, I built up a barrier of books on the table, behind which the illustrious inkstand was almost invisible.

"'Well, young man,' said my employer to me at the midday lunch, 'how are you getting on with your work? I would bet you have been writing poetry. Ah, what luck you have! You can say:—I have dipped my pen into Chateaubriand's inkstand! Not many men in France can say as much.'

"No one ever noticed the accident."

Myself: "Master, have you not slightly touched up the truth? Was the accident not premediated? Was it really without meaning it that you rained books upon the inkstand?"

"There you go, my dear Brousson, hypercritical as ever. Just because a man has made a little more stir in his life than others, and because he has been put, without anybody being able to say precisely why, into the category of great men, he can't do anything like the rest of the world. All his acts, even of the most insignificant kind, must be preconceived and are explicable only by the most specious reasoning. Childhood itself is not spared. Grave persons come and interrogate me with the airs of a magistrate about everything that passed in the life of the boy of alleged genius. They imagine that by looking at the way I sucked my thumb when I was seven, they could have discerned that I should be a member of the Académie Française. And they take me for a specially cunning hypocrite when I aver to them that I was a most unsublime little boy, shy and rather sleepy.

"Evidently it would be better for my biographer—for you, since you will not fail some day to chronicle all my redundancies—that I should have smashed Chateaubriand's inkstand in a rage of literary hatred and with the holy enthusiasm of a Polyeucte overturning the abhorred idols. That would be a kind of declaration of faith. You might add that I did it with a volume of Voltaire, and give still greater breadth to my supposed juvenile demonstration. So I repeat: you must resign yourself to see in this adventure the act of a clumsy boy and not of a fanatic. But of course you will make whatever you choose out of it."

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FROM THE BATH TO THE FIRE

Return from a voyage to Athens. The villa is full of trunks and packing-cases. Josephine says:

"I have put all the letters in the bathroom, sir. Now you can do what you like with them."

On inspection the bath is seen to be brimming over with letters, pneumatics, telegrams, pamphlets, and so on.

"You must burn all that, my friend."

"But suppose there is some letter of interest in the pile."

"Oh, youth, youth! There is never anything of interest in a letter. Besides which, most of them are three or four months old and out of date. However good the news was then, it has had time, alas, to become bad. Into the fire, I say!"

"But, my dear Master, you are indeed rather drastic. There might be a letter from some pretty woman there who——"

"Really! Your innocence touches me. Learn this from your old Master, my son: when a woman, pretty or ugly, writes to you, it is to ask money or a favour of you, or to pitch into you. What's more, be they men or women, it's only the bores who write. Nothing is so mendacious as the epistolary art, now happily dethroned by the nigger style of telegrams and pneumatics. 'Do me, I beg, the favour'—'Pray accept the assurance of my deep regard'—'Your most humble and obedient servant'—such phrases were all right in the days of coaches and Mme. de Sévigné, but are no more in

accord with our democratic times than red heels, lace stocks, and flowered waistcoats. We live, alas, in a business age. Bills of exchange have priority over 'billets doux.' I shudder at the thought of all the vexation contained in that unhappy bath. Into the fire, I say! I want to take a bath myself."

"But perhaps there's a letter from me among them?"

"So much the worse for it, and for me! Besides, what need have I of twenty lines, however sprightly, in your hand to appreciate, as I ought, your charming qualities? What did you write to me that you couldn't say? No; yourself excepted of course, all correspondents are bores. When they don't steal your purse, they steal your time. Because they have written a little nonsense, added your address, and stuck on a three-sous stamp, have they the right to invade your privacy, upset your habits, alter the hours of your meals, and imperil your livelihood? Into the fire with it all, my friend. I am not evil-minded, but I should like to singe a few of them with their own epistles."

"Heaven save me from your goodness, then!"

"By 'singe,' you must understand the culinary operation that consists solely in removing the hairs from a bird. They would have their heads singed, and their chins, and armpits, and rumps, maybe. After that I think they would be quiet."

"Are you insured, Master?"

"Yes. Why?"

"We may set the chimney on fire."

"I told you they were people only capable of causing annoyance. Go gently at it, and burn them in small bundles."

"Won't you even glance at the envelopes?"

"No, tempter."

"There are pink envelopes among them, and blue——"

"Into the fire with them! You are insupportable, this morning."

"How if I made one little experiment? Look. I take an armful out of the chaos and, shutting my eyes, save just one letter with the hand of innocence. See, I present it to you already opened."

"I see where you're heading for, rogue. No, no, no! I am a man of principle. To choose one would be an injustice to all the others. It would be to give myself into the hand of chance——"

"Of Providence."

"It's the same thing. Equality for all!"

"Very good. Still, I did hope for some mercy on your part. Did you not once tell me that your first love was witty Mme. de Sévigné, the patroness of letter-writers?"

"True, my child, and I do not conceal it. At the age of ten I was deeply enamoured of the high-born lady Marie de Rabutin Chantal de Sévigné, the great-niece of the mellifluous St. François de Sales. I had discovered a volume of her letters in my father's shop. I can see the book now with its romantic binding and a portrait of the lady. I thought her ravishing. The fact is that the picture

by Mignard from which the Marquise's portrait was engraved showed her as remarkably appetizing. The charms of her breast interested me much more than those of her letters. In my infantile passion I laid the picture against my cheek and covered it with little kisses. That was innocent enough, don't you agree? Then, a little later, it was Victor Hugo's Esmeralda of whom I similarly made a conquest—on paper."

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THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE

"Do you want a model of epistolary style? An authentic, indisputable model? Yes? Well, it is the soldier's letter that people make so much fun of. Do you remmber:

"'This is only to give you to know that I am well and wish you the same. If you can but send me a little money, I shall be very glad of it.'

"That is real eloquence: it goes straight to the facts. No rigmaroles; no useless flourishes. The soldier is direct, frank, and makes a frontal attack on the purse. That is much better, I assure you, than Cicero and Mme. de Sévigné and Voltaire. And no one knows the name of the humble soldier who was the first to find this charming and expedient formula that never wears out. It must have done duty in the time of Turenne, just as it did under the great Napoleon, and now does under M. Poincaré. The more often I read the letter, the more I recognize its genius. There is not a word too much. It is chiselled like a Roman inscription of

the best epoch. See: 'This is only to give you to know.' I defy the whole Academy to find anything better. What would they put in its place? A lot of periphrases and hypocritical and unctuous formulas, more sloppy than a pot full of mustard! The ignorant will perhaps criticize 'Give you to know'; but it is a pleasing archaism.[1] The soldier writes like Rabelais—no small praise. The remainder, moreover, is in tune with the beginning. It has the scent of the homely woods and gentle speech of old France. 'To give you to know that I am well.' Notice that there may be variants here. The soldier, as well as the civilian, is liable to sickness. In fact he is more so, for illness, which is a disadvantage to the civilian, is an advantage to the soldier. It saves him from fatigue duty and night marches, in short, from that laborious job of being a hero at one sou a day. Then the soldier writes: 'This is to give you to know that I am in hospital.' And he adds, without recking of mockers, 'And wish you the same.' That is to say, 'I give you to know, my dear parents, that I wish

[1] Five lines are omitted here. The passage including the preceding sentence, runs: "Les ignorants critiqueront peutêtre le verbe 'assavoir.' Mais c'est un archaïsme savoureux. Les anciens textes sont pleins de ce verbe qui supplée au verbe 'savoir' et y ajoute une nuance familière. Rappelez vous dans Rabelais, Gargantua: 'Le doute qui troublait son entendement était *assavoir'* s'il devait pleurer pour le deuil de sa femme ou rire pour la joie de son fils.'" This nuance is untranslatable, and the passage would be meaningless in English. "Est à seule fin de vous faire assavoir" would be better rendered by "is only to do you to wit," but that the form is too archaic to do duty as an expression in a modern letter.—J. P.

you were comfortably tucked up in a good bed like me instead of slaving at your work, and had nothing to do but take your ease and absorb soothing drinks.' The soldier is a pattern of soldiers as well as of letter-writers. He is thoroughly sound at heart. Such a phrase ought to make people weep instead of laugh. But, alas, men of genius are always made game of, and great masterpieces go unrecognized. So there is the family reassured. That is a great point. In the service of the country no one knows what may happen. So little is needed to bring our hero before a military court. The irritation of a Corsican corporal who has lost two francs at *manille*[2] or had a row with his mistress. So the family is reassured. Father smiles, and mother wipes the corner of her eye. When hearts are expansive, the purse-strings will be loosened. You see how excellent is the exordium. And how insinuating is the request! 'If you can but send me a little money.' 'If you can but.' Thus do the most philosophical minds express themselves: Descartes, Bossuet, Malebranche. 'If you can but send me a little money.'[3] Fine fellow! Nothing dictatorial about him. He does not write bluntly and brutally: 'Send me money,' or 'I have no money,' but tenderly, 'If you can manage it, after your own needs are satisfied, dear father and mother.' It would take a heart of

[2] The universal game of cards in France.—J. P.

[3] The nuance, again, in "Que si vous pouvez m'envoyer" is really untranslatable.—J. P.

bronze to refuse so hearty a request. Yes, they will send you a little money! The regimental postman will soon bring a postal order, and he will be content, whatever the sum may be. Which proves the moderation of his desires and his resignation towards the decrees of Providence. The soldier is a pattern of Christians.

"Now what will this noble warrior, this mirror of human and Christian virtues, do with his money? Carping minds will insinuate that he will hasten to liquidate it at the canteen. It is for that, they cry, that his good parents have stinted themselves! What do they know about it? In the first place, if he does drink his money away, which proves the weakness of his stomach rather than of his character, he will not do it all alone in stealthy egoism, but with his mates and all the mess. Maybe even with his enemies, the corporal and the sergeant. There you have the spirit of Christ, Rome, and Corneille all in one! It was by libations that the whole of Antiquity, our mistress in everything, celebrated domestic events whether happy or unhappy. Look at charming Horace, the Voltaire of Augustus' court. He says somewhere that it is right at times to lose your head for a friend. My soldier has not read Horace, but he knows as much as Horace: he is a great humanist. You can imagine the scene. How touching it is! He calls to his comrades in the mess: 'Hi! So and so! Brousson! France! Here's news from home! The old 'uns have sent me some money. Drinks on me!' And off they

go to the canteen. Perhaps in the evening they'll go elsewhere. Well, everybody cannot afford the joys of adultery or, if you like, the general's wife. Take this in the hierarchical sense.[4] For my part I confess that I cannot believe the soldier of genius who wrote this model letter to be a debauchee. 'Great thoughts come from the heart,' as some one or other has said. Perhaps he has a romance with a sweet girl in his own rank of life, still fresh and virgin, and adorned with all the virtues. He looks at her in ecstasy and squeezes her hand. He says little to her. He is a thinker. And his deeds bear witness to his sublime sobriety. She is a nursemaid at the notary's or the schoolmaster's. Perhaps she is a monthly nurse at the doctor's? In this case, my dear child, she is no longer a virgin. But she still is so for him.

"And let us not forget the formula at the end: 'Your son for life.' That is true pathos. 'For life!' It means: 'Whatever happens, my dear parents, even if I marry a queen or the daughter of a wholesale grocer, I shall not forget you. I shall always think of you as a baby does of its nurse. Your names will be the last on my lips, when I go on the last journey. I am your son for life and in death.' What more could you want? How pale, compared to this cry of flesh and blood, are the ceremonious protestations of the Great Age: 'Your most humble and obedient servant and

[4] The general's wife, as she is the greatest lady, so must *ipso facto* be the loveliest.—J. P.

son' ; or the finikin sensibility of the eighteenth century: 'I have the honour to be with the deep respect of my heart, my dearest and excellent mamma——.' The excellent mamma is Mme. de Warens!

"The more I reflect on this admirable letter, the more I deplore the ingratitude of men. It has served every day, since men first fought and were soldiers. That is to say, since Homer and the creation of the world. And no one bothers himself to find out whose flash of genius discovered this formula, so perfectly chiselled that the scythe of time has produced no effect upon it. A host of so-called great men are remembered. None of them ever did so well as this. So goes the way of the world!"

* * * * *

ARTICLE DE PARIS

When Clemenceau was named prime minister, France succeeded him on the *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna. It was Madame who arranged it.

"But why in the name of goodness, my dear friend, do you want to inflict this weekly poena on me?"

"Because it pays well. You will get some eight hundred francs an article. You will be able to make an extra visit to the antique shop."

"Very well, but you will do the article."

"We will do it together. It's simple enough; a mere weekly letter with an account of French politics."

Every Wednesday toward five o'clock the following scene is played.

"Here is the man from the *Neue Freie Presse.*"

"Well, Madame, and what does the man from the *Neue Freie Presse* want of me?"

"He wants the article. It must go off to Vienna this evening, or it won't reach in time."

"It must go off this evening? And who prevents it from going?"

"You do. I have spoken to you about it several times. But you no longer pay any attention to what I say."

"Your words do me wrong, Madame. They are unjust and pierce my heart."

"No wheedling, please. It is enough for me to ask something, for you to do the opposite. The man must have the article. You have half an hour to do it."

"Very well, Madame. Let some one take this tiresome messenger of the *Neue Freie Presse* of which I am the slave to the pantry and give him a glass of wine. Let him drink slowly and give me the *Figaro, Humanité,* and the *Croix.*"

The papers are fetched and hastily gone through. The decks are cleared for action. Madame, France, and the Secretary are all at their posts; and the leaves fly as in a park on a windy day.

"Before all else, Madame, I want to know what is the chief event of the week."

"Have you just dropped from the moon? Do you live in France, or are you a Red Indian or a

peasant from the Danube? The chief event is whatever you choose to make it. The Viennese will devour whatever you deign to send them like milk-rolls."

"Madame, come to my help! This *Neue Freie Presse* is the bane of my old age! Oh, why did I accept such a servitude?"

The scissors work; we cut out the most striking passages from the papers and gut the leaders.

"What's the good of changing anything?" remarks Anatole France. "It will only be spoilt in the translation."

François, the manservant, appears.

"Madame, the man from the *Neue Freie Presse* says he is in a hurry."

"Give him another glass of wine!"

With great labour France has composed the first paragraph. Then comes a quotation. It is copious. To set against the *Croix,* Madame snips another quotation from *Humanité.* I have scribbled something and it is torn from my hands. Together it makes about a column. François returns.

"It's the man from the *Neue Freie Presse* again. He says he must take the article: otherwise he will miss the train."

"Give him another glass."

"But, Madame, he has finished the bottle."

"What was it? White, or red?"

"Red, Madame."

"Then go on to the white. Keep him for a quarter of an hour. If he is hungry, give him some

ham and cheese. (To France.) What's that you're doing, while I am winning precious time? Making sketches of engaging females? When you ought to be turning the ministry out! It's enough to drive one crazy!"

"Madame, there is a passage in Lamennais——."

"Come come, we have a quarter of an hour! I know you! You want a week at least to find anything. What has Lamennais got to say about the ministry? Put it in, then. Who will think of verifying it? It will be translated and, as you say, spoilt in the translation."

Third appearance of the implacable François.

"The man of the *Neue Freie Presse* is going. He says he doesn't want to get the sack. He is as full as an omnibus."

France signs the article.

"What a pity," he says. "Such a good article! And that barrel of wine will go and drop it in the gutter and lose it!"

* * * * *

TAKE MY VENUS

"Who has put you, O my Aphrodite, in such sad case? She is so small, my Venus, and so sweet. She must be a Venus for humble folk and not a Cathedral Venus, like that of Milo. I can see her raised up on a column in the middle of the garden. You know, my Venus was painted. Like every self-respecting beauty she was made up. She had rose on her cheeks and red on her lips. Her eyes

had rings round them and her eyelids were shaded. Traces of this taste for many colours have been found and remind one of Saint-Sulpice. But you must remember the Athenian light, as soft and golden as honey. Under so harmonious a sky, everything must seem in harmony.

"My Venus in the little garden looked out over the square bed of egg-plant and love-apples. The divinely protective shade of the fig trees tenderly covered and uncovered her. People made her offerings and hung garlands of foliage and flowers and fruit, the first of the orchard's yield, on her column. Innocent doves were sacrificed to her. But one day came an ugly little foreigner who preached a barbarous God in a barbarous tongue. He was an ex-tentmaker, and excited the people's fanaticism with his visionary zeal. The idols were overthrown. My Venus was broken and thrown into a well, where she slumbered throughout the dark night of the Middle Ages. But she blossomed again like a flower. I do not know who disinterred her. And now the Olympian who watched egg-plants and love-apples will, I trust, protect my loves. I have one Venus already, the one in the library, but she has no head. You will tell me that the head is not woman's essential organ. Many women do without it. This one has her head, but no arms. The Venus of the library—I bought her at Rome—has no legs. Still, the essential remains. Which would you rather have—a Venus without arms, or without legs?

The question is embarrassing, but your answer is doubtless that you have arms and legs for two. You are at the age of fatuous happiness. At mine, one never has too much support.

"It is only by a miracle that these three divine fragments have been found. We will stick them together with the aid of a little plaster. See, nothing is lacking: but for the arms my Venus is complete. Victory!"

"I cannot share your enthusiasm."

"And why not, pray?"

"This Venus does not appeal to me. She is a fake."

"A fake! Wretched boy, you insult the Olympians."

"The torso and the legs indeed might have come out of a well. They are considerable fragments. But how did Venus come not to lose her head in the rioting? How is it that after so many centuries this little head no bigger than an apricot was found together with the rest?"

"Do you mean to suggest that the ladies of Athens have palmed off a forgery on me?"

"Pass your hand over your goddess's back, Master."

"Most willingly, my child."

"Do you feel nothing?"

"Nothing at all. And you? What impression does it make on you?"

"It makes on me the impression of a rasp.

Your Venus' legs are grained like morocco. She has had the smallpox."

"That's very possible. She is the patroness of the brotherhood. But what are you getting at? You are insupportable, with all your reticences. If you have anything in your breast against my Venus, ease yourself of it."

"This statue, my dear Master, is a copy, a very skilful copy. It is probably of Italian workmanship. You know that there exist factories at Rome."

"But it comes from Athens."

"It's an easy voyage to make. This is a copy of Venus the chaste, and it has been broken, but with care to preserve the main lines. It has been literally carved up like a chicken—head, arms, and trunk. And to give the modern marble an ancient texture it has been treated with acid. That is the reason of these asperities and roughnesses and of the smallpox."

"I have never met with such an intolerable turn of mind as yours. Your ingenuity in finding reasons to despise things is marvellous. Your critical spirit leads you astray. Of course I know that Venuses are fabricated at Rome by the dozen! Every schoolboy knows that they are mutilated and doctored with acid and martyrized to render them antique. But there is all the difference between such gross swindles and this delicious antique statue. This is one of your bad days."

The next morning:

"You know, the Venus that was presented

to me by the ladies of Athens is a patent forgery. Yes, yes, yes, it's one of the copies that are fabricated by the gross in Roman studios. I saw that at once. These modern Greeks are true Greeks through and through. As if I had asked them for anything! I must get rid of this votive encumbrance. Be so kind as to take it to Mme. S—— in the Rue de l'Abbaye. Rodin pokes about in her shop. Our modern Michael Angelo is completely tasteless. He buys everything that he takes to be antique. His ignorance is almost ostentatious. This Venus will do admirably in his collection. But she is heavy. How will you manage? Take one piece as a sample, which one? The legs? The torso? The head? Take the head. Lovers always fall victims to the nose. They are very wrong, though; for you can have a pretty little face and a miserable body. It's as though you were to judge a bottle of wine by the cork. One should always go straight to the mark. The head is but a small part of the whole, and the most insignificant where love is concerned. The head—why, every boy of fourteen has a girl's head. Dress him up and no one will know the difference. That is why I always begin by a thorough examination, so following the behests of human law and divine. It is a matter in which no attention can be too devoted. Take the head then. To-morrow you can add the legs, and we will keep the torso for the dessert."

Two days later comes the reply from the antique dealer in the Rue de l'Abbaye.

"She does not consider the Venus worthy of her windows. It is a gross forgery."

"And Rodin?"

"Oh, Rodin wants no more Venuses. He has his bellyful already. In fact he has sent back three or four to Mme. S—— and told her: 'Offer these Venuses to France. He understands nothing about them and will revel in them.'"

"What a numskull he is, that sculptor! My child we must leave fools to chatter. I will make you a present of my Venus. Where would be the best place for you to put her? And you know, she is perhaps genuine."

* * * * *

HUGO AND BÉRANGER

"The best poet of the nineteenth century is Béranger. From the point of view of syntax and language, I mean. His language is that of the eighteenth century, only much simpler, for he keeps far from the lyric artifice of J. B. Rousseau and of Lebrun-Pindar. Béranger follows the true French tradition and celebrates wine, love, and glory. He is a nationalist or, if you prefer, an imperialist—it was the same thing in his day. He is as brave as the archer of Bagnolet; but brave after the battle. In his memoirs the bard of the epic—for after all it's he who gave its finest wings to the legend—relates with charming effrontery how he escaped from conscription. He never saw the inside of a recruiting office. To-

wards the end of the Empire deserters abounded. 'When I met the gendarmes,' he says, 'I took off my hat to them. I was prematurely bald, and my baldness was as good as a doctor's certificate: they put me down at forty at the very least.' But that didn't prevent his celebrating the glory of Little Crop-head,[1] who would have sent Béranger to prison if he had not, as we may say with justice, taken time by the forelock.

"Some of Béranger's little odes recall the best of the sixteenth century.

'You will grow old, my mistress fair'[2]—

seems stolen from Ronsard. For my part, I confess, I put *Le Dieu des Bonnes Gens* far above *Ruth et Booz.* Don't look so scandalized; you distress me. Are you such an admirer of *Ruth et Booz?* Don't let's speak of it then. It is a masterpiece. It is a masterpiece of the ludicrous."

Anatole France begins to recite through his nose. He keeps a peculiarly pious tone, nasal like the sound of a pan-pipe, to run down those authors of whom he delights to make Aunt Sallies.

"This old man possessed fields of wheat and barley;
Though he was rich, he was to justice inclined.
There was no filth in the water of his mill,
And he had no hell in the fire of his forge.[3]

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[1] *Le Petit Tondu, i.e.,* Napoleon.—J. P.

[2] Vous vieillirez, ô ma belle maîtresse.

[3] Ce vieillard possédait des champs de blé et d'orge,
Il était, quoique riche, à la justice enclin,
Il n'avait pas de fange en l'eau de son moulin,
Il n'avait pas d'enfer dans le feu de sa forge.

"That is to say, stripped of metaphor, that his mill-pond was kept clean and that his forge shone like a new sou. Which means that Booz was a restless, arrant skinflint who passed his time in annoying his employees and going from the mill to the forge and the forge to the mill like a weaver's shuttle. He was rich: that suggests that he was unjust. No one could stay long with him. He was constantly at the employment agency.

"Booz was a good master and devoted parent.

"That's to say he was a good father and husband and paid his taxes on the first demand.

"He was generous, although he was economical.

"I told you, he was an arrant skinflint and his charity was mere ostentation. He would give things to be raffled; but no one had enough to eat in his house, and he always carried on him the key of the wine-cellar and the cupboard.

"The women looked more at Booz than at a young man.

"Remarkable observation! Women haven't changed, you see. They were making eyes at his money-bags.

"For the young man is fair, but the old man is grand.

"Yes, yes. But when they've got the grand old man's money, they'll have the fair young one into the bargain.

"And fire is to be seen in the eyes of young men.

"So long as the oil is there to make it burn!

"But in the eye of the old man is to be seen a light.[4]

"The light that is to be seen in the eye of old men is principally that of lustful desire."

* * * * *

METAMORPHOSIS

"L—— was dining yesterday with Mme. de——. He is astonishing. The strange creature is made up like a demi-mondaine. Naval officer as he is, he had a whole reef of rouge on each cheek and a pound of khol under his eyes. He does not want to grow old and thanks to these artifices he succeeds, although he can really not be said to look the younger for it. All these pomades keep him like an Egyptian mummy in a state of non-putrescence that is more disgusting than decrepitude. He looks not so much alive, as embalmed. I watched him all through dinner and he produced the impression on me of one of those stuffed birds

[4] The lines which Anatole France is guying are, together with the previous stanza quoted complete, from *Booz Endormi* in Victor Hugo's *La Legende des Siècles*. The stanzas from which these lines come are as follows:—

Booz était bon naître et fidèle parent;
Il était généreux, quoiqu'il fût economne;
Les femmes regardaient Booz plus qu'un jeune homme,
Car le jeune homme est beau, mais le vieillard est grand.

Le vieillard, qui revient vers la source première,
Entre aux jours éternels et sort des jours changeants;
Et l'on voit de la flamme aux yeux des jeunes gens,
Mais dans l'oeil du vieillard on voit de la lumière.

J. P.

with glass eyes that the middle classes love to stick on the top of bookcases."

* * * * *

A DILEMMA

An anecdote in a conversation about duelling.

Sainte-Foix was sitting one day at the play next a professional bravo.

"Sir," said he to his neighbour, bowing in the politest way, "I beg you to be so kind as to leave the stall where you are sitting and to move two or three seats further off."

"And why, pray?" asked the other with his feathers bristling.

"Sir, I am a man who loves politeness, nor do I like distressing others. Do not oblige me to say something that will be unpleasant to you."

"My little gentleman, I give you my word that I shall remain in my place until you tell me why you want me to leave it."

"Sir, courtesy is the virtue I most prize. I beg you to change your seat with good grace and not to force me to give you disagreeable reasons."

"Enough of this! Here I am, and here I stay."

"For the last time, sir, will you change your seat?"

"And, by the powers, why should I?"

"You insist, sir? I am deeply distressed. Heaven is my witness that I have done everything to avoid giving you pain. Very well then. If I ask you to sit a little further off, it is—it is because you stink, sir. You stink horribly—your feet and your

whole person. You smell like a shoulder of mutton or a Capucin friar. The devil himself couldn't stand it."

"Death and damnation, you insult me! Give me your address. To-morrow morning two of my friends will come to arrange matters with two of yours. Zounds! Small sword or sabre or pistol——"

"What, sir, a duel, because I consider that you give off an evil smell? Come now, reflect. You are unreasonable. If you kill me, you will stink no less. And if I kill you, you will only stink the more!"

* * * * *

DUCHESNE, THE PIRATE

"At that time Monsignor Duchesne was plain Abbé Duchesne. He was, I think, at the Carmes, together with Loisy. However, he already belonged to the realms of Immortality. He was a member of one of the component parts of the Institute—the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres—which are a kind of poor relations of the Académie Française, the great, the true daughter of the illustrious cardinal. One day a keen dispute broke out between the abbé and a well-known leader of the Celtic movement. The question was, what language did Adam and Eve speak in the Garden of Eden: Cimbric or Low Breton? Each of the two maintained his view with patriotic firmness. As in the burlesque battle in *Lutrin*[1] they

[1] Boileau's poem.—J. P.

hurled quotations at each other, and rained blows with dusty folios. The sitting came to an end; but the dispute still continued and was prolonged through the hall and into the street in the midst of cabs and omnibuses, and finally from landing to landing up the Abbé Duchesne's staircase and into his dining-room, where our two antagonists revived the fire of the eternal quarrel with unexpected texts and biting insinuations across the table.

"At last the intrepid Celt realized that it was becoming late. If the question was not exhausted his breath was.

"'I see,' he wheezed in a bitter tone, 'two *babas au rhum* in that dish on the sideboard. These pleasant dainties warn me that it will soon be time for you to partake of corporeal sustenance with your lady housekeeper, and I should regret indeed were I to retard so touching a collation. I will only ask you one more question: is there still a boat for Auteuil?'

"'That,' replied the abbé without cordiality, 'I am unable to tell you. I pay no attention to fresh water traffic.'

"'True,' retorted the Celt promptly, 'being a descendant of Breton pirates, you have always had an irresistible leaning towards more spicy elements.'

"On which he left without shaking the hand that the Abbé Duchesne—did not hold out to him.

"They remained on bad terms for two years but became reconciled at a funeral. As they walked

behind the coffin, they worked out an intermediate theory that was a compromise between their two opinions and spared the vanity of both: in the Garden of Eden our common ancestors, Adam and Eve, talked now Cimbric, now Low Breton. Cimbric was kept for great occasions and formal conversation: Low Breton was for moments of ease, affection, and endearment. You laugh, little wretch? Oh, I read in your heart that you think I am exaggerating. Well, ever so little! Very good. Now take down at random a volume from the publications of the Ecole des Chartes. Read there, and you will find arguments of a precisely similar character, even if they are less amusing."

* * * * *

JUDGMENT REVISED

"My best books? Those that had no success: *Histoire Comique* and *Jeanne d'Arc*. My poorest books? Those that every one praises: *Thaïs* and *le Lys Rouge*."

* * * * *

AN EXPLANATION

"Why am I drawn towards socialism? Better be drawn than be driven."

* * * * *

A TOUR IN TOURS

"Have I ever related to you our tour in Tours? No? So much the better. It's worth while.

"It was last summer when we were touring in Touraine. We did the châteaux of the Loire. A château every morning, a church at midday

and a museum in the afternoon—without counting the booksellers and the curio dealers.

"One morning at Tours I determined to evade the hard labour allotted to the day and, while Madame was in her bath, attempted an escape. She hailed me from the window.

"'Where are you off to, so early?'

"'To St. Gatien, Madame, to the cathedral.'

"'The cathedral! Are you going to get converted? The priests are not out of bed yet!'

"'What an idea! Listen to the bells. They are ringing for low mass. But I am not going to make any devotions, but to admire the splendid building.'

"'One minute. I'll come with you.'

"I resigned myself to my morning being spoilt, and we set off. Hard by the sanctuary fair creatures were laughing at their windows. Doubtless you have noticed yourself that ladies of pleasure, like night-birds, generally nest round cathedrals. I have often verified this. When you come to a town you don't know, you always find carnal consolations side by side with the spiritual. There is a connexion between piety and gallantry that deserves to be closely studied, and would make a fine subject for a man of learning of your age. Well, in a lane near the grand cathedral of St. Gatien, I spied a lovely girl leaning out of her dormer window. She was clothed in little but her hair; but what hair, my child! It was a veritable cloak of Venetian gold in which, with her milk-

white breast, she looked like a Titian. She noted my ecstasy, winked at me, and made me a little sign, as much as to say: 'Put up your chaperon somewhere or other, and come back. I am fair. I am not unkind. Life is short.' Ah, the glorious creature, my friend! The clashing bells seemed to ring out in her honour, for there was more divinity in her than in all the cathedral. Her charms were visible across the window-sill, like luscious fruits. The demon of sensuality entered into my veins. I felt full of joy, and blessed the Lord. I could not rest in suspense. I was as struck to the ground by grace. Madame was walking by my side, in a very bad temper. So I replied by a wink to the wink of the sweet creature and firmly, deliberately pushed my companion into the darkness of the church. 'Go to the end of the choir,' I whispered to her. 'In the apse, behind the high altar, is the tomb of a child of Louis XI. Oh, yes, Louis XI. What child? A boy, or a girl? I don't know. It died in infancy. But the monument set up on the tomb is a marvel of marvels. No one who has not seen it can know anything about French sculpture. Its boldness and grace stamp it as on the border-line between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It is a magnificent, unique thing—the masterpiece of the greatest and least known of sculptors.'

"'It must be indeed,' said Madame, 'for you to be so excited about a tomb. You really seem out of your skin. So it was on account of this child

of Louis XI, dead in infancy, that you got up so early? Let us go and see it then.'

"'Ah, I quite forgot! I was so stupid yesterday as not to buy a very rare book I found at Lebodo's, the second-hand bookseller. There was the subject of a charming short story in it. He may sell it to some one else! I hardly slept last night for thinking of it. I will rush off to Lebodo and come back with the book in my pocket.'

"'Very good. Let us rush together. Louis XI's child will not fly away in the meantime.'

"'No, no, Madame. I will not allow it. I have committed a folly and I will expiate it. Go to the end of the apse and admire the dauphin's tomb. You have such exquisite taste that you will be enraptured with this matchless unknown masterpiece. I could not dream of letting you come with me to the bookseller's: your little feet would suffer terribly on these horrible stones. Go to the tomb of Louis XI's son at the end of the choir. It's a marvel!'

"Quite dumbfounded, Madame advanced into the incense-laden gloom, while I made off to God's luscious creature. How long my conversation with this pleasing person lasted, I cannot say with any approach to scientific accuracy, but I think, without boasting, three-quarters of an hour. Returning to St. Gatien, I found Madame in a state of frantic rage. Her hair was awry and the beadle and the pew-openers were cowering before her uplifted parasol. The priest had interrupted

his holy incantations at the altar. Madame looked like Athalie in the temple.

"'Where is the tomb of Louis XI's son?' she barked. 'I insist on seeing the tomb. I will not go away without seeing it! I shall telegraph to the Conservator of Historical Monuments and to the Minister of Public Instruction. It is monstrous! Listen, these dolts have the impudence to tell me that this monument that you have described does not exist!'

"I hardly knew how to calm her, but it had to be done, for I believe the priest was sending for the police. I chose the heroic path and told her the truth. 'Madame,' I said in an easy tone, 'these good people are right. The tomb of Louis XI's son, that incomparable masterpiece of French mediæval sculpture, is not at Tours, but at Angers.' Madame suddenly fell silent. Her wrath changed to stupefaction. For two whole days she did not speak to me. They were two days gained."

* * * * *

CASUISTRY

"That terrible Jaurès is really baptismally naïf. He dined with Madame yesterday and of course made a great speech at dessert on future society. 'Every one will have his place. Everything will be in common. There will be no more rich and no more poor.' While he was soaring over Arcadia, I amused myself by sticking a pin into his balloon.

"'And in your ideal republic, what are you going to do with works of art, Jaurès?'

"Suddenly Madame takes alarm. She casts an anguished glance on the beautiful tapestries that line the dining-room: it is a glance that embraces furniture, silver, and everything.

"'Yes, Jaurès,' she asks, 'when the great day arrives will you leave me my pictures and statues and silver?'

"'That is a question of organization,' replies the Demosthenes of Carmaux in his Gascon accent.

"I give him another dig.

"'Yes or no, Jaurès: do these statues and works of art belong to Madame, or to the nation?'

"'To the nation!' shouts Jaurès, thumping the table with his fist, 'to the nation!'

"'There we have it,' sighs Madame. 'Invite people to dinner, and as soon as their paunch is lined, they carry off the spoons as a patriotic souvenir.'

"Jaurès is visibly perturbed.

"'Madame,' says he, 'it is incontestable that these marvellous tapestries, these radiant pictures, these noble statues, and all these works of art belong to the community.'

"At this point the tribune makes a pause, takes a sip of champagne, and continues in a more conciliatory tone:

"'But since these marvels compose a harmonious whole that it would be barbarism to destroy, and since we revolutionaries are not vandals, all

those works of art will be left in trust with you, till the social revolution. You shall be their responsible guardian.' "

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THE BLACKEST OF THE CHILDREN OF MEN

He calls B—— "the blackest of the children of men." It is about this statement that he tells the following little fable:

"B—— came to Paris from his distant provincial town in the hope of becoming a 'coalie,' or a bar-tender, or a hot chestnut-man. But nature, which made him so black, had given him a remarkably fine voice. One day while he was singing an air as he carried a sack of coals, the manager of the opera remarked the coalman's beautiful organ. 'What richness!' he thought. 'What softness! That fellow has feeling and the art of variety. Pity he's so black.'

"The manager of the opera in those days was an honest man and recruited his company from among singers. We have left such archaic scruples far behind. To-day, according to Madame's information, it is ministers, senators, and deputies who nominate the tenors, baritones, and sopranos. It is no longer a question of voices but of votes. Where was I? Oh, at melodious B—— the blackest of the children of men. At the second verse of the song the manager could no longer restrain himself. Drawing from his fur coat—for opera managers always wear fur coats—a portly Russia leather pocket-book, he chose from among the

thousand-franc notes a miserable note for a hundred francs that happened to be there, no one knows how—for the manager of our national institution never has anything on him but thousand-franc notes, being wholly made of gold. Holding out the blue slip to the coalie, 'My friend,' he said, 'you sing like an angel, but you are as black as the devil. Here are a hundred francs. Leave your sack there; give up this vile trade. Go straight with the money to the Samaritaine. Take a bath, and don't spare the soap. From the bath, go to the shop opposite. Buy a frock-coat and a top-hat and come to see me at the opera. That is the place for you. I will make your fortune and you shall make mine. You may be black, but you have the wealth of Pactolus in your throat.'

"Black B—— took the note but didn't leave his sack. He did not go to the Samaritaine, but to the Embankment. He took no bath, and bought no frock-coat nor crush-hat, but books and autographs. He came to the opera blacker than ever but when he opened his throttle, it was Orpheus himself. The manager was in a state of ecstasy, and gave him a part. Since that time, my friend, black B—— enchants all with his singing. No one can let out such glorious gurgles as he. As long as he warbles no one notices his marvellous blackness. But the moment he stops, then he appears what he is in reality—a 'coalie.'"

* * * * *

OH, GOBINEAU! OH, STENDHAL!

"Gobineau is prodigiously tedious. He wrote without ceasing, for his own pleasure, but rarely for that of others. When I see Kahn (?) I shall tell him: 'My friend, you disinterred Gobineau; now you must bury the corpse again.'

"What's the matter with all the young men, to prostrate themselves so before Stendhal? There is no author less proper to youth: for Beyle, love is a geometrical problem."

* * * * *

THE BLUE POTS

A bargain is going on between Photopoulos the Greek curio dealer and M. Bergeret in the latter's bedroom. M. Bergeret is at leisure this morning and amuses himself by tormenting the Levantine.

The subject of the discussion is two little pots of blue glass. They are scored with white and are marvellously graceful and delicate, with iris tints added by time that resemble the colours of a pigeon's neck. France handles them with delight and makes their dimples laugh in the sunshine. The Greek, who is placed opposite him, attempts to read a price on the author's face.

"How old may these glass pots be? Two thousand years? Or two?"

The Greek protests.

"Oh, Master! You think I would offer you fakes! I should never dare. You are too much of a connoisseur. Of course I have forged Tanagras, for imbeciles."

He brings out of an inside pocket of his overcoat a box that once contained Turkish delight and exhumes a clay figurine from the cotton-wool.

"What do you say to that, Master?"

"It's very pretty."

"Well, it is a fake."

"So much the worse for it and for you too. What is it worth, fake and all?"

"I know a collector who will give three thousand francs for it."

"Then, my friend, it is not a fake and you are calumniating your figurine. I will buy it from you at the price of a modern piece of work, on condition that you give me into the bargain the address of the collector."

The Levantine (impudently): "Perhaps it's yourself."

France (giving back the figurine with disgust):

"The Greeks never made hands like that. Those are the hands of a cook. To come back to your pots. How much do you want for them?"

"Five hundred francs."

"Take them away."

"Then quote me a figure."

"What's the good? The difference between my price and yours is too great. Besides your pots are fakes. Things like these are fabricated by the gross at Murano, near Venice."

"Oh, Master, you are laughing at me. Look closer at them. How fine and elegant they are!

And their colour! There is not a glass-worker in all Italy capable of making that."

"They are good copies."

"Copies? I saw them dug up from a tomb myself."

"Very possibly. Had you been a little sooner, you would have seen them buried in the tomb. That's the classic dodge. Not a tourist goes to Greece but a little hypogeum is organized for him, and he sees dug up coins manufactured in Italy, medals in Germany, and pots, glasswork, Tanagras, and lamps moulded in France."

"But, Master, this tomb was in my father's garden. He was digging up an olive tree one day——"

"Minerva's olive tree. I knew it!"

"And among the roots of the tree——"

"Your olive tree goes too deep into history.

"Listen. Your pots are pretty, although faked. I will give one to a lady who fancies herself at archæology. She has great patience and her charms are not faked. What's your bottom price?"

"A hundred and twenty francs."

"The pair?"

"No, no! Each."

"You are a pirate. I will take one at sixty francs to offer to the lady. Together with a bag of chocolates."

"And what shall I do with the other? No one will want to have one without the pair."

"Don't weep, my friend. To oblige you, I will

take it. Now then, I have no more time. Here's a hundred franc note. Look at it well. It's less pretty than your pots, but it's not faked. Will you take it? It's lunch time."

The Greek puts the note in his pocket with an air of fury. He lisps, with his hand on his heart:

"I give you my word, dear Master, they are genuine. It was my father——. And if you were not a great writer, I would take them away—I would break them."

As soon as he is gone, France examines the delicate little pots with a magnifying-glass. He rubs his hand and strokes his beard.

"You know, my friend, they are genuine; perfectly authentic. I shall keep them for myself."

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THE ARGENTINE LADY

An Argentine lady has expressed the desire to present her two young sons to the most famous author of modern times. She has high hopes of the interview. Her sons will never forget it and will be honoured throughout South America by reason of it.

I read her letter to Anatole France. Mme. de A—— is a friend of mine. I give her two boys lessons in French and literature.

"What age is the mother?" he asks *ex abrupto*. "Her letter is painfully high falutin. It might be written in the days when the expiring patriarch of Ferney blessed Franklin's sons. I haven't torn the lightning from heaven, and I am not a patri-

arch yet and don't excel at benedictions—particularly benedictions of boys. If they had been girls now! Why doesn't she go to her parish church?"

"Her piety is all for you, my dear Master. Her drawing-room is papered with your portraits and her library lined with the rarest editions of your works. She made a pilgrimage to the Quai Malaquais to stand in contemplation before the house where you were born. She went into the shop, which belongs now to a curio-dealer, and carried away a fragment of glass from the window which she keeps in a medallion like wood from the true cross."

"What's her age?"

"It is not easy to say. She is a ripe, majestic beauty."

"Fair or dark?"

"As dark as the night, And her eyes! Ah, and her hair, her breast!"

"For a choir-boy you have a singularly appetizing way of offering the basket of holy bread! Tell this South American enchantress that I place myself at her feet and at her orders: her time shall be mine, day or night. But couldn't she leave her children at home? I feel it hardly moral to bring these bounding lion cubs to an Academician. Was it for that they changed sky and climate and navigated the perfidious ocean?"

A captious discussion follows as to the most fitting place for the meeting.

"At Madame's? The surroundings are more

imposing, but it is not to be thought of: Madame is jealous as a tigress and would scratch the Argentine lady's eyes out. The Villa Said? Not bad: picturesque, but uncomfortable. The lady and her unavoidable darlings would have at least to have tea offered them, and cake. Tea and cake; yes, and what about Josephine? If that most bilious of maidservants is in a good temper, ah, then everything will go well and the house will be metamorphosed into a temple of sweetness and of sweets. But, by the sainted Socrates, if she has got out of bed wrong foot first, then there won't be a single lump of sugar in the house. All the napkins, cups, and teaspoons will be at the pawnbroker's. The range will be under repair. There will be an explosion of gas. So we must take measures beforehand. Now you are in Josephine's good books. Yes, yes; she has a tender feeling for you. Well, play upon it. Oh, platonically! Confidentially. She is as vain as a turkey-cock. Seem to lay bare your heart to her. Put it something like this: 'The old boy is getting more and more intolerable every day. A princess from a far-off country, who has heard in her palace of the wonderful way you keep the house and make tea, has journeyed here to see for herself if it is true. She wants to come to the Villa Said to show you her children, Josephine, but he's so faddy and jealous that he says it's impossible. He declares it'll turn everything upside down, and that you have no spoons or biscuits or silver, in fact nothing that's needed; and that you've never made

tea in your life and are such an old owl that you don't want to receive any one.' You'll see, my friend, that will make her as sweet as honey, and she will give us a banquet. She will go into the parks and steal flowers for the table!"

Josephine has ruined herself in candles, which she gets from a wax-chandler near Saint-Sulpice who supplies churches and chapels and has the papal arms over his shop. The drawing-room downstairs is illuminated like a catafalque.

France has put on his finest skull-cap, in currant-red flowered Jouy cloth. His moustaches are victoriously curled. He rushes to meet the visitor, kisses her hand, and launches out into a madrigal which meanders from the front-door to the drawing-room. The lady pushes forward her children who have been parrotted by Mme. Th—— of the Comédie Française in a laudatory address. They are in Eton jackets, which surprises the Master.

"I hoped to see you dressed like toreadors," he says.

Their mother's fine, black eye fascinates him.

"My children," he goes on, "you are so good as to express to an old man your admiration for his works. It is I rather who am dazzled by your grace and youthful pride. When I consider your works, madam, I feel I am poor indeed."

The boys have brought copies of *Sylvestre Bonnard* with them and beg for an inscription.

"*Sylvestre Bonnard!* Always *Sylvestre Bonnard!* It is the most insipid and tedious of all my

books. I wrote it to win a prize of the Academy; and I wrote it so well, or rather so badly, that I won the prize! Have you won prizes at Eton, my children?"

The vigilant mother steps into the breach.

"My boys are little exiles who have great difficulty in keeping up with their comrades, despite the best will in the world. But they are making wonderful progress. They speak English like their mother tongue and read Dickens with perfect ease."

"I am fond of Dickens," says Anatole France. "He is a very good writer. He is often compared to his disadvantage with our Daudet. That is not my opinion. Of course Daudet is charming; but he lacks depth. His characters are arbitrary and superficial. He sees only the skin of men and the varnish of things. He lacks general ideas. Dickens' work, on the contrary, is of social importance. It insinuates a moral into the plot. And then he has the feeling of his dignity as a writer. A wretched little beggar-girl in Piccadilly is beaten by a drunkard, and the poor child's lament rises above the city's smoke to the seat of eternal Justice in the radiant empyrean. The lament of that wounded bird is heard and lets loose the thunder. I envy Dickens his generosity and his genius for credulity."

He signs his name in the books that the boys have brought.

"And you, my dear lady? Do you ask me

nothing? Will you go away hence empty-handed?"

The fair Argentine purrs: "There is something I should like to ask, but it is very delicate and I fear to be indiscreet."

"Indeed? So delicate as that? To what can you allude?"

"To your soul, my dear Master."

"My soul?"

"Yes, your soul. I am anxious for your soul."

"Ah, would that you were so for my body!"

"Do not laugh on so serious a matter. You have no religion. You do all in your power to be damned. And your work is so seductive that you damn me with you. But I mean to stop myself on the incline, and I would save you too with me."

"Stop yourself then, and I will hold on to your petticoats. Let the devil do his worst, I shall not let go."

"Do you think sometimes of your end?"

"Never, madam, never!"

"What, is this world enough for you?"

"Yes indeed; I am not ambitious."

"Oh, how I pity you, so famous now, so adulated! And if the next world——!"

"If only I am seated on the same cloud with you, I shall not mind which side I am on: with the goats or with the sheep."

"Dear Master, you turn everything into ridicule. Yet death is a serious thing."

"Believe me, nothing is more comic. At a funeral the deceased always cuts the silliest figure."

"You received a good Christian education. Your mother was a pious woman. You began so well! Oh, there is good in you: you will come back to religion."

"Being with you, I am already in it, and with you I will go wherever you want."

"How if I took you at your word? Would you come with me now to the Spanish chapel? We should be there in a second."

"Is that your parish church?"

"Yes."

"Ah, what a pity! It has no reputation."

"What does reputation matter! What is needed is grace."

"Ah, as for grace, there is more here than in all the sanctuaries in Paris. I feel its miraculous workings in me!"

"Let us stick to the point. Will you come to the chapel with me?"

"Why not? It will be like a novel of the Restoration days."

"It is not a question of novels! There you will find good confessionals and excellent padres, who will wash your conscience clean with the most skilful speed."

"I shall be happy to confess my sins—but to you alone."

"Ah, my dear Master, what should I do with your sins, who have enough of my own? Alas, you are one of my sins, my mortal sin!"

"You make me vain."

"Yes, my mortal sin. My confessor forbids me to read you."

"And you want to put me into the hands of a dolt like him? Why, he will forbid me to write!"

"No, but he will exhort you henceforth to write edifying things, and to employ the incomparable gifts you have received from God in the service of religion."

"And, pray, do I do anything else?"

"Moreover you know, whether you would or no, grace operates."

"It does, indeed, it does!"

"Then why will you not come with me to say just a tiny little prayer before the Madonna?"

"Not a tiny little prayer, no! Don't let's be niggardly. A whole novena, if you like; but here, and with you. And why not? There are as many Holy Virgins and relics here as in your minimus of a church in the Avenue de l'Alma."

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DYNAMITE IN CURL-PAPERS

"There are certain truths that are peculiarly hard for the hierarchies of established order and common sense to swallow, and they must be dished up with an air of extreme indifference. We work for a middle-class public; it is the only one that reads. Therefore don't tear the veil brutally from the temple. Rumple it. Riddle it with sly little holes. Under pretence of mending it cut off little bits here and there, and dress up dolls in them.

Let your reader have the easy triumph of going one better than you.

"People take me for a juggler, a sophist, a droll fellow. In reality I have passed my life twisting dynamite into curl-papers."

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LIVE HAPPY IN THE WORLD

He tells a good story of how he got rid of a liaison that had become a nuisance.

"I didn't know how to get out of it. Whoever said 'Nothing in nature is so heavy as the body of a woman you have ceased to love,' was far from stupid. She was of the clinging variety, and the more I tried to disengage myself, the more she clung. But in the paroxysm of our passion she had given me her latch-key.

"The other day she was so innocent as to say to me: 'Will you kindly give me back the key? My husband is returning to Paris?'

"I leaped at the chance.

"'Here is the key!' I answered in a broken voice. 'I understand the depth of my misfortune. I shall die of it, but what matter, so long as you are happy!'

"With that I sped down the staircase four steps at a time. From the landing she raised ululations like Dido over Ænæas departing. And I continued to repeat bombastically, with my hand on my heart; 'I shall die of it! I shall die!'

"At the door I jumped into a cab, she pursuing me at the double. 'Whip up your old nag!'

I cried to the cabman. 'You shall have a big tip.' And turning to her, with my hand on my heart: 'Live happy in the world, and leave me in peace!'"

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THE HISTORIC TABLECLOTH

An American lady begs insistently for the favour of an audience, and moves heaven and earth to get it. She gets introductions from ministers, and from academicians, and from curio-dealers.

"Is she attractive?" asks Anatole France of Josephine.

"Oh!" answers the maid, sketching as it were a well-filled basket in the neighbourhood of her bosom with a gesture of the hand.

"Good. I'll see her."

The lady comes. Her charms are opulent, but somewhat ripe. She invites the Master to dinner. He graciously accepts. But the luckless woman proceeds to disclose her plan. At dessert Anatole France will be so charming as to write some profound thought on the tablecloth, with his name and the date. The tablecloth is historic. All that is famous in the Old World and the New has eaten and written on it. The American lady has the autographs embroidered. There are more than three hundred of them: Debussy, Maeterlinck, Massenet, Rostand, a cardinal——

Suddenly France remembers that he is ill. His stomach is out of order, or is it his liver? He had forgotten that he was on a diet. His doctor has

forbidden his dining out. It is a question of life or death. And he pushes his admirer towards the the door.

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THE MECHANISM OF HEAVEN AND THE MECHANISM OF LOVE

"Nature! The love of nature! The cult of nature! All this nonsense of Jean Jacques makes me feel sick. How does the sun rising on the Alps better prove the existence of God, pray, that Mme. de Warens rising from her bed? Very true, the mechanism of heaven is well regulated. But love too is an ingenious mechanism."

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THE HIDEOUS SENSE OF SHAME

"Religion is passing away, but she is leaving us the most ill-favoured and tyrannical of her daughters: the hideous sense of shame. The ancients had modesty, and you can still see at Rome ruins of temples to Modesty. The sense of shame is an attitude, a part of the code for the body: modesty is the mastery of the soul. Without modesty there is no pleasure, for it is modesty that renews it. It is the hygiene of delight. With the aid of a few pins and buttons the most libertine of women can affect a sense of shame; but to attain to modesty something else is needed. We are generally satisfied with the sense of shame. It is the first thing that is taught us: to make the sign of the cross, to blow kisses, and to button our breeches. Not to speak of morality, is it really clever con-

tinually to attract children's attention to a certain part of the body? By the way they are lectured you would think that it was inhabited by a cruel god. In the case of girls the matter takes a commercial turn. This, or nearly this, is what is said to them: 'Cover it up well darling; let no one get wind of it. It's a treasure! It's your capital! Keep it close. If you let the least tiny scrap of it be seen, all the rest is worth nothing, and you will be a low creature that no one will want for his wife.' Thus the majority of little girls, and big girls and women too, get the idea that they may do anything when the light is put out. What do you say to virtue that only has the strength of a candle?"

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MADAME'S BABA

"For boys, the method chosen is no better. First impressions are tyrants. The schoolboy discovers Venus in the lavatory or the maid's bedroom, and for all his life the sordid memory of it will tyrannize over him.

"It is the story of Madame's baba.

"If you want to make Madame fall into a catalepsy, offer her an innocent baba. You will have to rush for smelling-salts, unlace her corset, and beat her hands. She will stay six days in bed and be six months in convalescing. And all this on account of a poor tooth! When she was a little girl, she found a canine, a human tooth, in a cake she was given at the confectioner's. The cake was

a baba, and since then the mere sight of these dainties makes her feel sick. If she had found the tooth in a 'Jesuit' or an 'éclair,' she would have had a horror of Jesuits and éclairs. And what would have happened if she had found the tooth in a piece of bread?

"I have tried to reason with her. I say: 'Do you imagine that confectioners pull out their canine teeth for fun and stick them into cakes like sixpences into Christmas puddings? Your baba is unique in the history of confectionery.' She doesn't answer: she is sick. That's an argument to which there is no reply!

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VIRTUE AND THE BOLT

"Why is virtue as a rule so ungracious? A woman's virtue is her art in shooting the bolt. Every time I have opened a door without knocking, I have discovered something repulsive."

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BACCHUS AND THE MOBILIZATION

"Don't speak to me of the peasants' patriotism. When I am at Madame's place in the country I often talk to her farmer, who was in the war of '70. His two favourite stories are, first, the adventure, which he thinks excessively comic, that befell a captain in the cuirassiers. The unlucky man received a ball in the anus and died of it: my old peasant still dies of laughter relating it. The second is the story of a sly-boots who escaped from the battle thanks to his simulated stupidity. He had

been ordered to bring some horses that were requisitioned to a certain spot where fighting was going on. He wanted to save his own skin and that of the horses, with whom he had struck up a friendship. Thanks to them the mayors of the different villages received him well, found forage and shelter for the horses and a cosy place by the fire for the man. He asked no better than to have charge of them till the end of the war. So on getting his orders in the morning he inquired the way with care and, when the direction had been clearly pointed out to him, turned his back on it. You can imagine the abuse that met our Scapin from the first detachment he met: 'Oaf! Idiot!'—greetings which he received with perfect indifference. The way was meticulously explained to him, and—at the first cross-road he went off in another direction. And thus he went through the whole war, eating and drinking well, and sleeping on the straw with his dear horses, and sometimes with the girls.

"In the whole story as told by my rustic there was not one word of blame for the deserter—for he was in fact a deserter—but on the contrary warm admiration and a touch of envy. The hero of '70 was, in the opinion of the countryside, the man with the horses."

"If war broke out, I am certain your peasant would go to fight together with the whole village."

"Yes, if the schoolmaster and the priest gave the example. It would be harder in the towns. The day of the mobilization there would be a bar-

rel of wine with a flag stuck in the bung-hole before every wine-shop. The mobilization would depend upon Bacchus. It would depend also on the drivers and firemen on the railway engines. What if they should reverse steam? What if they should refuse to drive the trains?"

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THE SILENT GODDESS

Passing a funeral he raises his hat with an ostentation that astonishes me. I ask him:

"Who are you taking off your hat to? To the priest? To the cross? You are an atheist. To the dead? Would you have taken off your hat to him in his lifetime? Has he only to become a part of nothingness to gain your sympathy?"

He reflects dreamily, hat in hand. Then, twisting the brim about with an air of embarrassment, he says. "It is my own destiny that I have saluted."

Now we are before a butcher's, all hung with quivering flesh. I make bold to say to him:

"Why do you not salute the meat shop? These muscles here will be the prey of men, as the corpse we saw just now will be of worms. It is the same destiny."

"Your wit is too specious."

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"Let us live in peace that we may die in peace. The difficulty is not to die, but to live. Let me have no tedious priest at my death-bed, but a pretty woman, and may the hands be fair that close my eyes for the great sleep!"

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He loves lounging, and goes wherever he may see the populace. Street scenes are his delight. He comments on them *ad infinitum* and finds the most unexpected parallels between the women of the *Halles* and the ladies of Syracuse. This evening the Embankment in front of the Institute was black with people. Leaning over the parapet the crowd was gaping downwards towards the river and seemed to find refreshment in it. We pushed our way through the joyous throng, and there, stretched out on the bank, we saw a corpse of a drowned man with a policeman standing by. The body was as black as ebony. On its poor rags the river had deposited a layer of slime dried to the colour of cinders. The white nails on the blue distorted hands were horrible to look at. This nightmare spectacle excited the wit of the populace, and jokes rained down on the drowned man: "Must have been a nigger! He threw himself into the water to get white!"

"These jests are horrible," said France with a sigh. "They are the more so, my friend, because this Paris of ours is in all the world the most pious in its care for the dead. Look at the cemeteries, most of all the people's ceremonies in the suburbs: whatever the season may be, you might think them gardens. When a funeral passes, all the men uncover, reconciled to one another in the religion of the tomb, and even the least devout women cross themselves. It's true, they make the sign of the

cross furtively. Well, and these same people insult those piteous remains. Why? Because the dead man has not conformed to customary ceremony. Without the black fringes and silver beads sweeping the ground, he is dead like a vagabond, outside the law and religion, and unworthy of pity. But when he is put in his bier, then the mockers will cease their jests and will uncover. There is an art of dying, just as there is an art of living. The people love fine funerals. The sight of one of those floral mountains crossing a street fills them with pity and sadness in proportion to the fortune that the wreaths denote. They feel besides a certain pleasure, and are not sorry to see that the great and happy of this world must go to rot in the earth."

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"How should I like to be buried? Like Sainte-Beuve. He managed to take his leave with the discretion of a man of wit, on tip-toe, if I may say so. No solemn announcements. No religious ceremonies. Let us spare the living these mortuary allegories and draperies, these gross, ridiculous symbols. Since we must go, let us take the shortest road. I love women too well to wish to sadden those who will pass me on my last drive.

"I was at Sainte-Beuve's funeral. The obsequies were without religious rites. On the coffin was a marvellous wreath of Parma violets sent by Madame Jeanne de Tourbay—she who

should have been Madame de Loynes. At the cemetery, when the coffin had been lowered into the grave Lacaussade, the poet, stepped on to a mound and said: 'Sainte-Beuve, adieu! Adieu! You who have accompanied him hither, I thank you in his name.' That was the model of a well-ordered funeral. Let him who will and can, accompany you. It is the greatest of frivolities to waste time in cemeteries. Let there be no speeches in the field of the silent goddess!"

THE END